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the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1995 (Department of Health 1996).

There is a growing emphasis on the need to improve the efficiency of the public sector, and to ensure that the public sector is able to deliver the services that are required by the public. This has led to a number of initiatives, including the introduction of competition, the restructuring of public services, and the introduction of new management practices.

One of the main reasons for the need to improve the efficiency of the public sector is the increasing pressure on public resources. The public sector is now responsible for a much larger proportion of the UK's gross domestic product (GDP) than it was in the 1980s, and this has led to a number of initiatives, including the introduction of competition, the restructuring of public services, and the introduction of new management practices.

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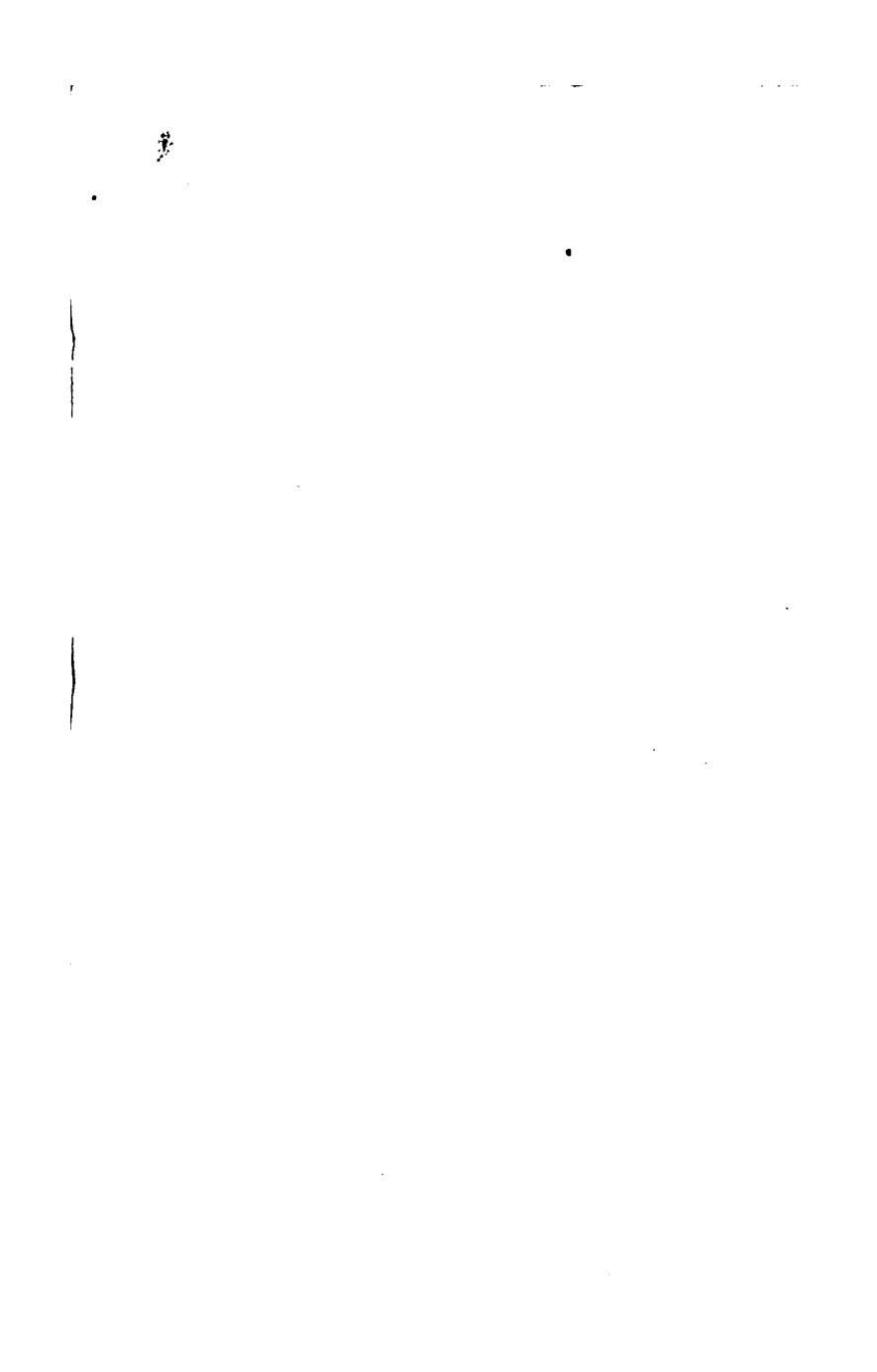
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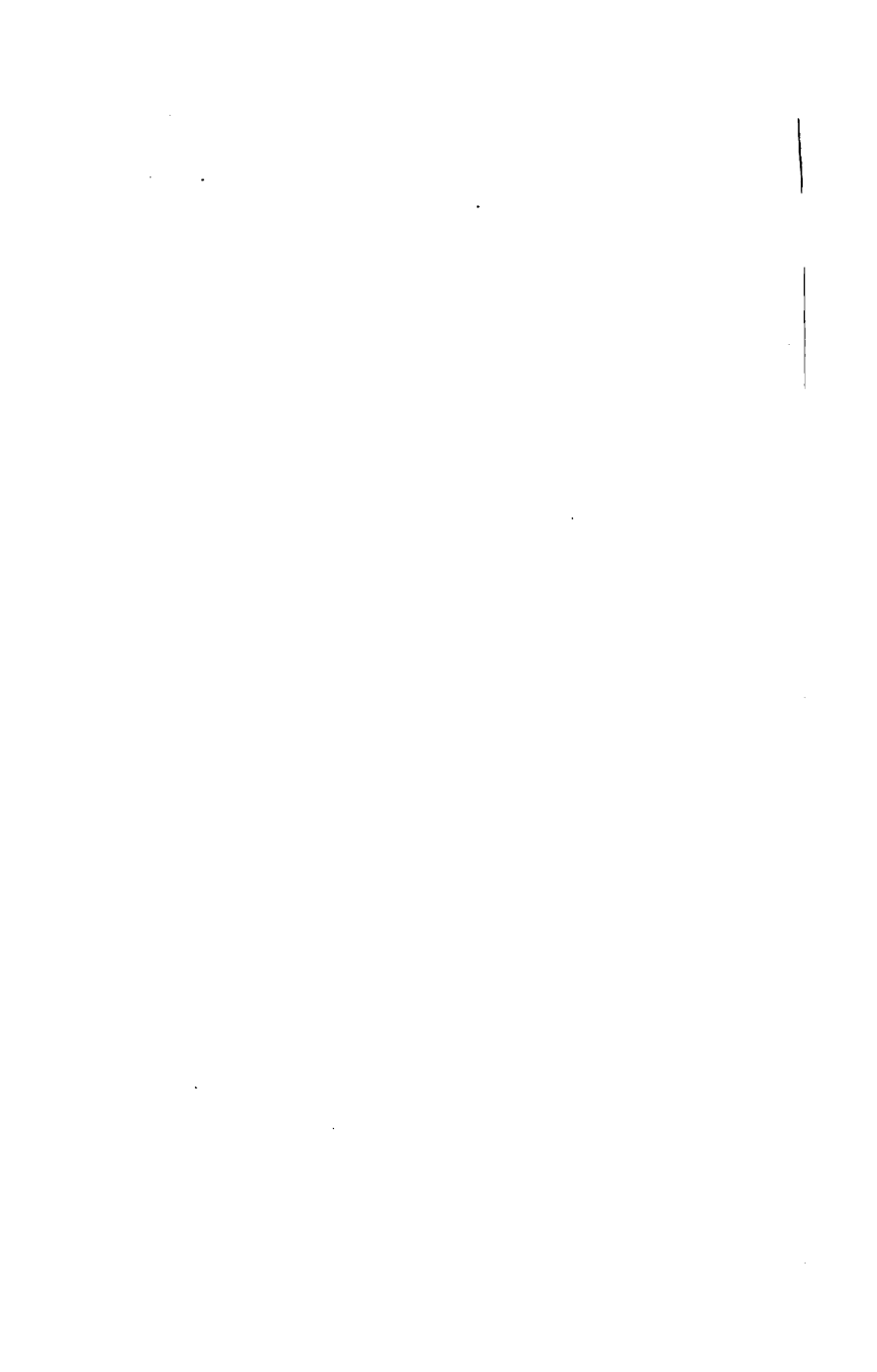
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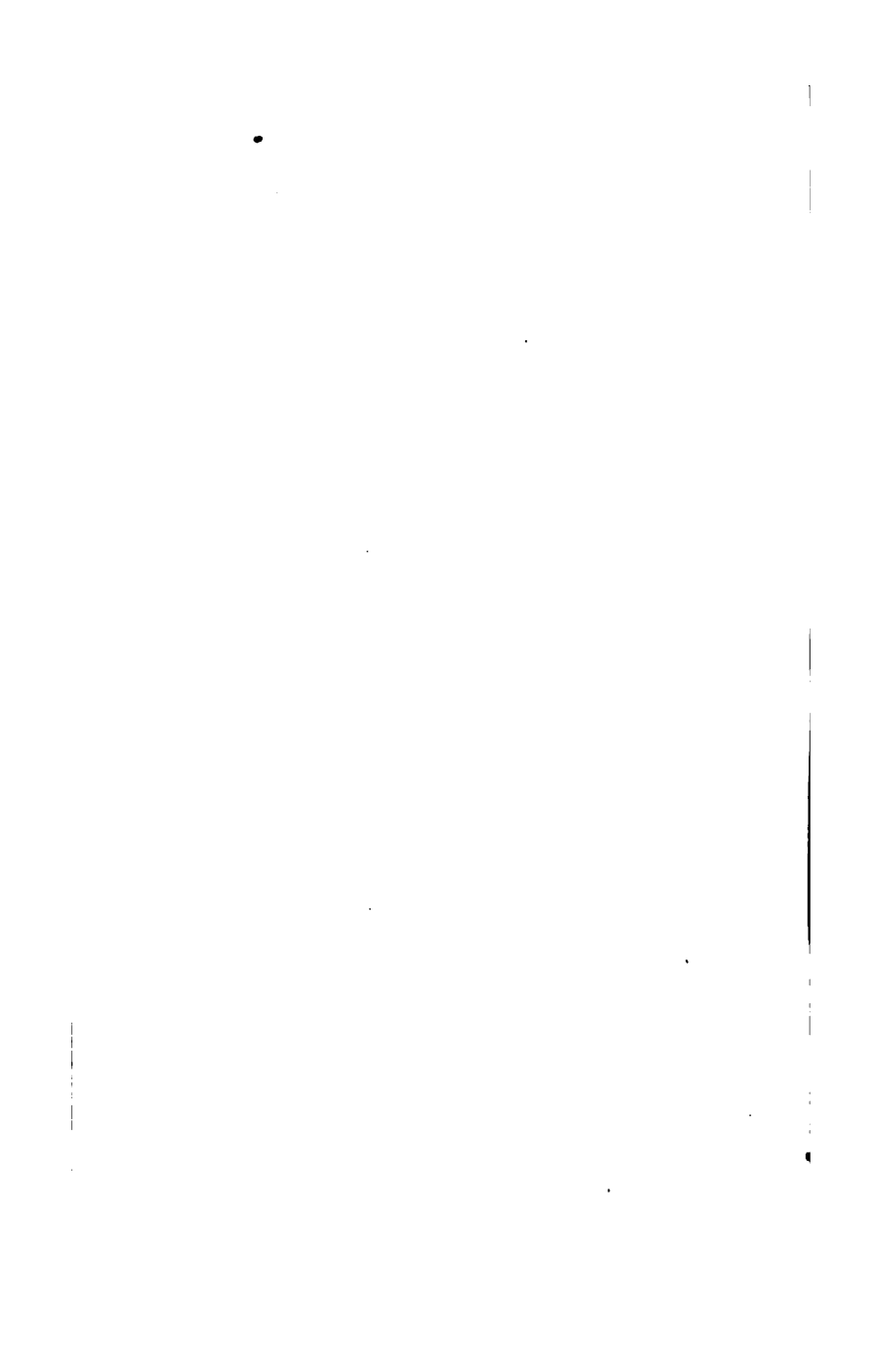
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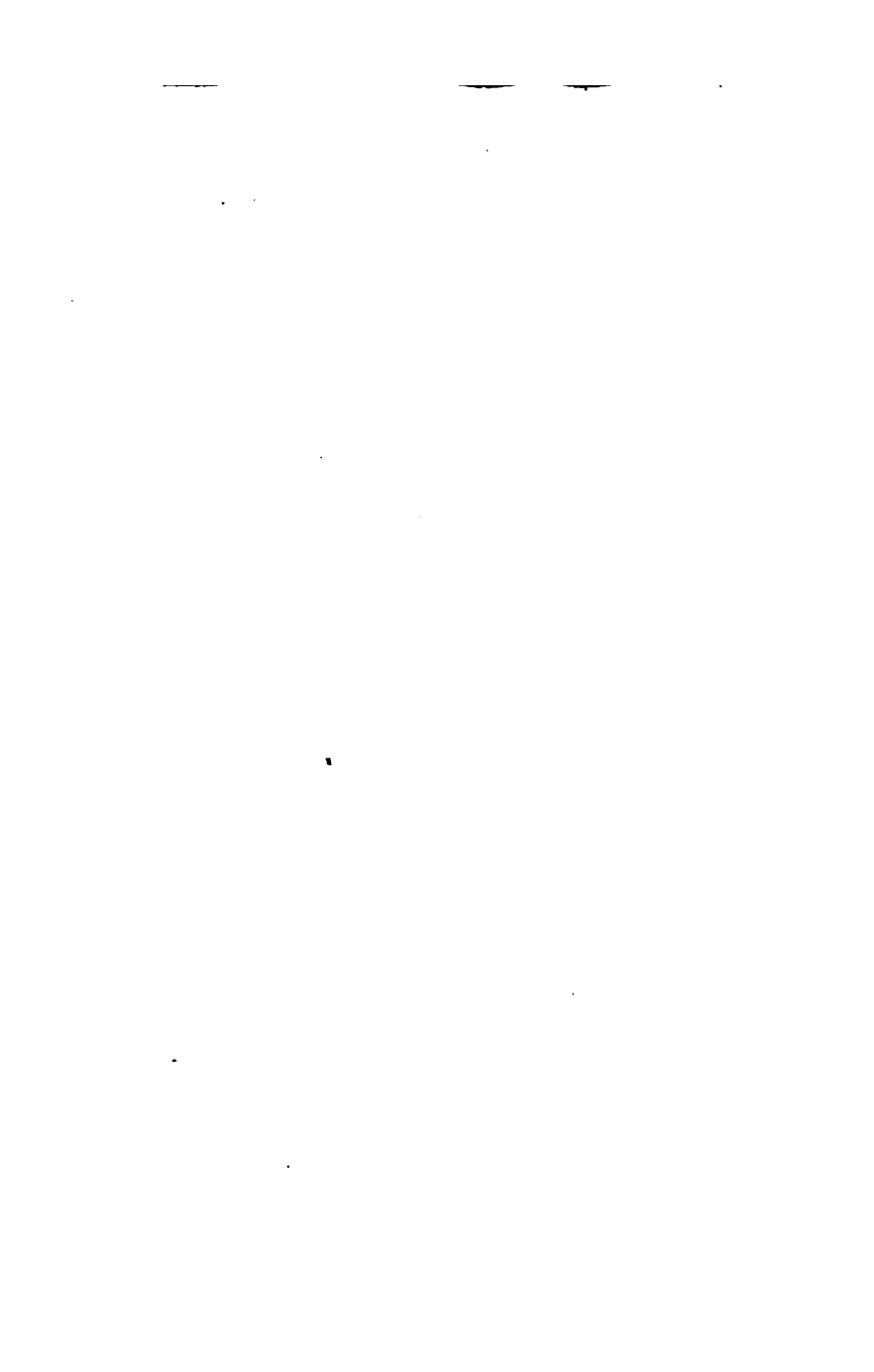


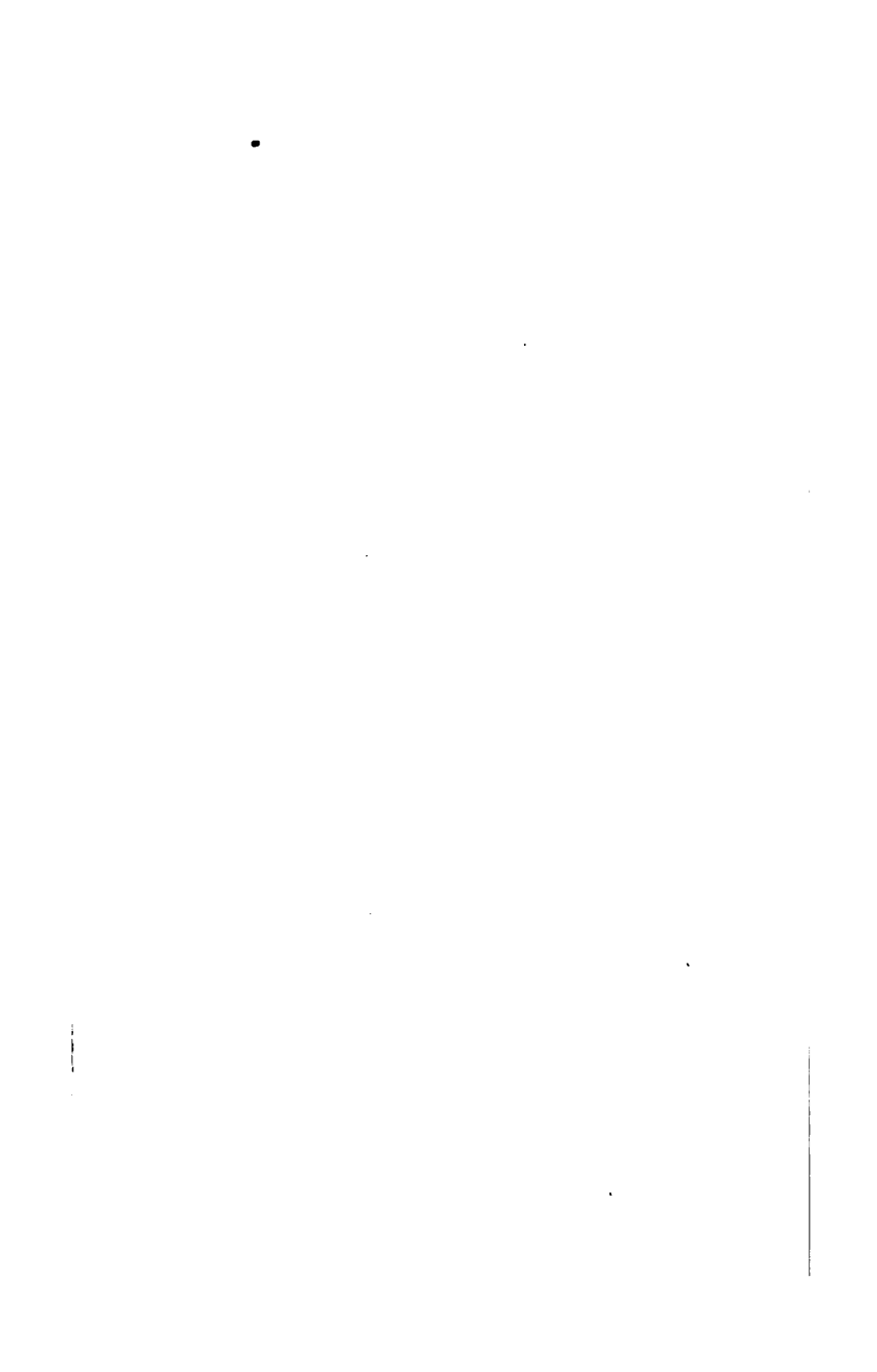




HELENA BERTRAM.











Front.

HELENA LOST.

Page 74.

HELENA BERTRAM.

A Tale for the Young.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE FOUR SISTERS," "HARRY AND HIS HOMES,
ETC. ETC.

"Teach me Thy love to know,
That this new light which now I see,
May both the work and workman show :
Then by a sunbeam will I climb to Thee."
GEORGE HERBERT.

LONDON:
ROUTLEDGE, WARNES, & ROUTLEDGE,
FARRINGDON STREET;
NEW YORK: 18, BEEKMAN STREET.
1859.

249. u. 125.



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HELENA BERTRAM.



CHAPTER I.

It was on a bright afternoon in early autumn, when the air was just sharp enough to make every one feel in good spirits, and the ground under the ash-trees had begun to be sprinkled with yellow leaves, that a little girl stood on the top of a green bank that formed the boundary of a large sunny garden, and raised herself on tip-toe, that she might the better see a long way down the road, from which she was only separated by a laurel hedge.

The young lady was rather pretty, with a fair complexion, blue eyes, and thick brown curls. Her face had been shaded by a large straw-hat; but the hat was hanging on her shoulders, having been pushed back in the eagerness of her watching.

At last she was rewarded by the sound of a horse's feet in the distance. The moment the regular pattering caught her ear, she ran down the bank, and, disappearing amongst the shrubs, was soon seen again, some twenty yards off, standing for a moment before the heavy iron gate. With eager fingers, in a twinkling she unlatched the gate, and ran out upon the

high-road, quite deaf to the call of a sharp voice from the other side of the garden,—“Miss Edith, Miss Edith! you know your mamma doesn't allow of that!”

Some distance Miss Edith had to run before she met the horseman for whom she had watched so long. This was a young gentleman about fourteen years of age, tall and slender, and so like the little girl, that any one would have guessed him to be her brother. There were, however, points of difference between them. His countenance was thoughtful, and the expression of his mouth determined; and it was only when his face relaxed into a smile, as it did the moment he perceived his little sister, that he looked so very like her.

She was breathless with her exertions, and it was not till he had stopped his horse, and dismounted beside her, that she was able to gasp out, “Oh, Ernest!——”

“Well, Miss Edie, what is in the wind now? I suppose that you want to bespeak the first swing this afternoon. But come, ‘Bonnie’ shall carry you back again; you are quite out of breath with running:” and, as he spoke, he carefully lifted his sister upon the quiet horse, and giving her the bridle, put his arm beside her on the saddle, and walked along.

“Oh, Ernest!” began Edith, again, “what do you think?”

“That you had no business, after all, to be running out to meet me,” said Ernest, as if he had suddenly recollected something. “Did I not hear mamma say the other day that you were never to come out upon this road alone?”

“Well, but Ernest——” began Edith.

"There is no 'but' in the matter," said Ernest, interrupting her: "I wish only that you girls could come for a month to our school, to get some notion of obedience."

"Now, Ernest," said Edith, pouting a little, "I have a good mind not to tell you at all, if you are so cross."

"Tell me what?" said Ernest, pretending to look indifferent.

"It is very important, really," said Edith; "I heard mamma say so to papa one morning. She said, 'It is a serious responsibility, with so many children already in the house.'"

"Why, what is going to happen to us all, Edith?—tell me quick."

"We are to have a new companion," said Edith, all her animation returning, when she found that Ernest was really interested; "mamma has told us so. And she has such a pretty name; and she is older than Marian; and she has always lived by herself; and her papa is dead, poor thing; and mamma says we must all be very kind to her."

"Whew!" whistled Ernest. "This is a piece of news, indeed. And what is the pretty name, Edie?"

"Helena Bertram," replied Edith. "Helena! Isn't it nice?"

"I don't know," said Ernest; "that depends upon the owner. We have a boy called Cecil Montgomery, and he is the greatest cad in existence. But I see now how it is; last Monday morning, or the one before, I heard papa say that his old friend, Colonel Bertram, was dead. But, Edie, this damsel is not coming to live with us, is she?"

"Oh yes," replied his sister; "and she is to have the pretty little green room, within Marian's and mine, where Louy sleeps; because mamma says that she has been accustomed to be by herself; and still she will not be lonely."

"Not very lonely, in your neighbourhood, I should think, mademoiselle," said Ernest, looking affectionately at the animated face above him.

"But what do you think, Ernest?" continued Edith, using her favourite phrase again; "I am not sure that Marian likes it much—about Miss Bertram, I mean. We shan't have to call her Miss Bertram, shall we, Ernest? Nurse does, but that is different; and she is to be like our eldest sister, mamma says; and that is what Marian doesn't like, I think. But still, Marian will be Miss Ellersley; only she won't be helped first, and that is quite right, because Miss Bertram will be the visitor,—no, not a visitor exactly; but you know what I mean, Ernest?"

"About as clearly as you do yourself, Edie," said Ernest, as the horse stopped before the door of the stable-yard; and Edith's confidences and suppositions had to be postponed until she had been lifted down, and the horse given into the care of Richard: then she and Ernest passed through a low door that led into the kitchen garden, and went round to the other side of the house, where, upon a smooth green lawn, all their brothers and sisters were assembled.

Oakridge, as the residence of Captain Ellersley was called, was built upon a rising ground, close to the high-road; but a few old trees, from which, perhaps, the place derived its name, rather sheltered it, on that side, from observation. In front there was merely a

broad, circular drive, with a grass-plot in the centre, and a shrubbery beyond ; but when you turned the corner, a much prettier part of the grounds appeared. Under the drawing-room and library windows were beds of fragrant flowers, only separated by narrow paths of turf, whilst, between these two rooms, a low door, with a porch overgrown with creepers, gave easy access to the house. Below the flower-garden the wide-spreading lawn sloped down to a narrow stream, which formed the boundary of the garden, and was almost hidden by the tall trees that grew on the other side. In the garden itself were only two trees, but these were great elms, and they grew at the end of the lawn, and were the strong supporters of the swing that Ernest had alluded to.

On a wooden seat under one of the trees sat a respectable-looking woman, who was occupied with her sewing, and in talking to the baby who was rolling on a carriage-rug at her feet. Near to her were two little ones, happily playing with a ball. These were Percy and Louisa, the next eldest to the baby. Not far off was Master Willie, nurse's favourite, a grave, fat, rosy-faced boy of six years old. He was engrossed by a mischief of his own invention—which must, surely, rouse nurse's ire, if anything would—for he had got her sewing-reel, and was carefully winding the cotton from it in and about the rose-bushes that were growing just out of nurse's sight.

He was the first to catch a glimpse of Ernest and his sister, and, dropping the reel, he ran forward with a signal-cry of "Ernest! Ernest!" Then a rush was made by all the little ones ; but Ernest passed them with a "Well, Lou!—Halloo, Percy!—Be

quiet, Will!" and went quickly to the baby, seized her in his arms, and, amidst her crows of delight, tossed her high up in the air.

"Oh, Master Ernest!" cried the nurse, hastily putting aside her work, and getting up, "do please be careful. I'm always in a tremble when I see you tossing baby in that way. Oh, just think, if anything was to happen to her!"

"Why, what is going to happen to her, do you think?" said Ernest, pausing for an instant to kiss the child. "You know I always give her a shake-up when I come home; the poor little thing is quite moped without me, I do believe."

Nurse began an indignant remonstrance; but it was of little use, for Ernest was now surrounded by the other four, each telling the most interesting history of something that had occurred during his absence,—to a rabbit, or a canary, or a guinea-pig,—while Edith, above them all, was pointing to Marian gathering flowers all by herself,—“and she won't let me help her, because, she says, they are for mamma, and she thinks mamma likes them from nobody but her.”

“Ha! by the bye,” said Ernest, “where is Marian? Halloo!”

This shout was addressed to a figure that was wandering amongst the flower-beds. She turned the moment she heard his voice, and began to run towards him. Finding, however, that this process shook her roses, she slackened her pace, and came more soberly up to them; then, although her eye was brightened, and her cheek was flushed with pleasure, she only said, quietly, “How do you do, Ernest?”

"Ah, Marian!" he cried, as he kissed her amongst the flowers, as usual. "I can't shake hands, you see, for baby is growing so fat, that I can only just hold her. Do you know, Marian, she was so pleased to see me, that she nearly sprang up from her carpet. Indeed, I shall quite expect to see her trotting to meet me soon."

Marian stooped to kiss and fondle the universal pet, but baby wanted the flowers, and snatched at them; and, when Marian drew them hastily away, she began to scream, and, in spite of Ernest's womanly rocking and nursing of her, would not cease her cries.

"As usual," exclaimed nurse, hastening to the rescue; "it always ends in a cry, Miss Marian, when you touch her, poor little dear. Now, Master Ernest, give me hold of baby immediately."

Ernest meekly gave up his charge. He did not often venture to stand against nurse in a real tantrum; and, besides, he felt that baby this time was beyond his power. And no wonder, when she had got (as nurse soon discovered) a great thorn rankling in one of her tender little fingers.

"Oh, Marian! how could you hold the roses so near her," cried Ernest; and nurse, taking up the strain, began to scold Marian and pity the baby in the same breath; so Marian, to relieve her sorrow and indignation, burst into a childish flood of tears.

No one, however, noticed her; for nurse had taken out a needle, and was preparing to extract the thorn. Ernest had just been allowed, as a matter of necessity, to hold the little hand, when a loud scream from Percy made them afraid that a second accident had

happened; but it was only his fear that nurse was going to do something very dreadful to baby, and Louisa was infected with the same fear, and joined lustily in the roar.

"You silly things," said Willie, gravely—he had been watching for some time;—"it is all for baby's good."

At Willie's wisdom Edith set up a merry laugh, and this rather reassured the little ones; but still it was with tearful eyes that they watched the operation.

Nurse's experience, however, soon managed it, and the thorn was held up on the point of the needle by Ernest, and the baby's crying soon dropped into such a drowsy murmuring, that nurse said that she would take her to her cot, and added, "Will you please, Master Ernest, give an eye to the children till Bessy comes, and don't be on with any of your tricks with Master Willie, for he is just bad enough."

As she spoke, nurse caught sight of the network of thread and rose-trees that he had been fabricating, and gave such an angry, "Now, just see!" that the culprit judged it better to run away, and remain deaf to the threatenings that she sent after him.

"Now, Ernest, please give me a swing," said Edith; "And me," "And me!" echoed the two little ones.

"*Seniores priores*," replied Ernest—"that means eldest first. Stop till I fetch Marian."

"She won't come, very likely," said Edith, as her brother ran down to the side of the stream at some little distance, where Marian was sitting on the crooked trunk of an elder-bush, with her eyes fixed upon the water, that was making a rapid little current between two stones.

"Come along, Marian; we are going to the swing," called Ernest, before he had got up to her.

"I don't care!" said Marian, in no very amiable tones.

"Fiddlededee, Marian; don't be sulky; come along."

"I am not sulky, Ernest," was the reply; "but you are all cross, and I like better to sit here."

"Upon my word," said Ernest, "you girls are the queerest set. I just fancy a lad running off by himself in this way, because—nay, I don't know what the because was; do you, yourself, sister mine?" he added more gently, for the tears were rolling down Marian's cheeks, and he could not bear to see her cry.

"Nurse blames me for everything," said Marian. "Edith is her favourite, and she treats me just as if I was a child, like the others."

"And doesn't she treat me like a child, too?" said Ernest. "I fully expect she will be sending me to school in Percy's pinafore some fine Monday morning;—but, seriously, Marian, I do think she succeeds in keeping you all children, or you would not cry for such a trifle as that."

"But you blamed me too," said Marian, indignantly; "as if I would have hurt baby on purpose."

"Did I, Marian?" exclaimed Ernest; "then I did not mean it; for I am sure you would never dream of such a thing; so, pray think no more of it, but come and swing with us. By the bye," he added, suddenly recollecting, "I was left head-nurse. What an ass I am. I hope Percy has not tumbled into the hollow."

And with another hasty "Come along!" Ernest ran off to see if his charge were safe, and Marian, more slowly, followed him.

The hollow that Ernest alluded to was a hole in the stream, at the extremity of the kitchen garden, and beyond the elm-trees; it was about three feet deep, and the only part that was at all dangerous for the children, who were forbidden to approach the place. But there were railings before it, and this, and the idea of danger, made it only the more attractive to the venturesome Willie, and his favourite mischief was to escape to the hollow, to climb upon the railing.

And here, sure enough, Ernest found him now, and all the others too. When Edith saw him coming, she cried out—

“ Oh, Ernest, do come, and make Willie get out of the water. I found him splashing about, and trying to get Percy in too, and he would have pulled him in if I had not held him.”

Without ceremony, Ernest in a moment pulled Willie out, and gave him a box on the ear into the bargain; and as Bessy, the nursery-maid, came up at this moment, Ernest desired her to take Willie to the house, to be dried.

But Willie did not approve of this mode of ending his pastime, and, roaring with vexation, he soon contrived to wriggle out of Bessy's grasp, and set off across the lawn, hotly pursued by the panting maid. Still running, he was just turning the corner of the house, when he ran against his papa and mamma, who were coming round to the porch door.

“ Willie, what is the matter ? ” exclaimed his mamma; then seeing how wet he had made her rich silk dress, she added, in some alarm, “ My dear boy, have you been in the water ? ”

Willie was too much ashamed and out of breath to speak, so Mrs. Ellersley turned to the nursery-maid. Bessy, however, knew scarcely anything, except that "Master Willie is a very naughty boy, ma'am," and that was a very familiar story; but Edith, followed by the others, had reached them now, and she was quite ready to tell how "Willie had done nothing but mischiefs all the day, and when Ernest was talking to Marian yonder, he would plodge in the water; and he tried to get Percy in, only I held him; and Baby got a thorn in her finger, poor little thing, from Marian's roses; but nurse took it out with a needle, and then she went to sleep, but she cried a great deal."

As Edith finished her eager tale, Marian arrived with the bouquet for her mother; but as soon as Mrs. Ellersley caught sight of the roses, she said,—

"You should not have held those prickly flowers near to baby, my dear;" and Marian, with an indignant look at Edith, retired into her most injured self, and the ready tears flowed again.

Captain Ellersley had ordered Willie off to bed in a summary manner, and his wife was now all impatience to see the nursery; but, as she stopped to welcome Ernest, whom she had not perceived before, she turned round to his father, and said,—

"Ah, my dear, when our own little ones give us so much trouble, can you wonder that I rather dread the coming of a stranger."

CHAPTER II.

It was not more than a week after the events described in the last chapter, when the stranger arrived. The weather had changed suddenly during that time, and instead of bright autumn, with its warm sunshine and its lingering roses, it was now misty and cold, the leaves were falling off quickly, and a continued rain had kept the children indoors for two days. Now their games had been exhausted; they had got into every kind of mischief, and had quarrelled; their papa was angry; their mamma had a headache; their nurse was very cross; and there was nothing left for them to do but to wish that the rain would cease, and that Miss Bertram would come.

The rain did not cease; it poured down rather faster than before; but Miss Bertram came, rather earlier than she was expected, when Marian, having escaped from the noise of the children, was reading by herself in the drawing-room, and Edith, never hearing the sound of carriage-wheels, was playing at bo-peep with baby in the nursery.

Miss Bertram was shown at once into the drawing-room, and her travelling companion with her; and Marian, who had looked upon Miss Bertram's coming with such mingled feelings, had to receive her alone. The dignity of Miss Ellersley, of Oakridge, deserted her entirely; she turned very red, laid down her book hurriedly, and came forward timidly, with a faint, "How d'ye do?"

This was quietly replied to, and an awkward pause followed, which was broken by Marian pushing a chair towards the young lady, who was much older in manner than she expected, and who had twice raised her very dark eyes, and looked at her with a sad but steady gaze.

But her companion, who seemed a nurse, or house-keeper, said, "You had better sit down, my dear;" and then, turning to Marian, added, "It has been a long day for our journey, and Miss Helena is very tired."

"No, Sarah, I am not tired," said Miss Helena, in a very decided manner.

"Oh, my love!" began Sarah—but the entrance of Mrs. Ellersley put a stop to the discussion, and to Marian's embarrassment.

There was no lack of kindness in Mrs. Ellersley's welcome to the young orphan; but her embrace was coldly received, and there was no answering smile to the cheerful hope that Mrs. Ellersley expressed, that she would soon feel at home amongst them. But perhaps it was too soon to expect it, and Mrs. Ellersley went on with a few kind questions about her journey. Miss Bertram replied quite fearlessly, but with short, old-fashioned precision, and rather haughtily.

It was a relief when Mrs. Ellersley proposed that she should go up stairs, and take her bonnet off. Miss Bertram rose at once; but, taking hold of her companion's hand, said, in a low tone, "Come with me."

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Ellersley; "bring your old friend with you, and we will go first into the nursery.

There you shall see my baby. Are you fond of children?"

"I don't know, ma'am," replied Miss Bertram, following up stairs, but still keeping fast hold of Sarah's hand, who continued, for her,—

"She has not had many opportunities, ma'am. It was a lonely place, was the Court. As I have been telling Miss Helena, it will be a pleasant change for her to have young companions, poor dear."

They were now in a long narrow passage, that led to the nurseries, and at this moment a door opened, and Edith rushed out, exclaiming, "Oh, mamma, I do believe that——" then stopped short, and blushed.

"That Miss Bertram has come," said her mamma, smiling. "Well, and you are quite right, for here she is!" and, taking hold of the young lady's hand, she added, "That is Edith; do not forget her name; she is my second daughter. Now come and see the little ones."

Miss Bertram followed her into the large, cheerful room that was devoted to their use, and whilst Mrs. Ellersley, with two boys pulling at her dress, and one dear little girl clinging to her hand, was trying to give directions to the nurse for the care of Mrs. Sarah, she stood like a statue near the door, until she was roused by a sweet voice saying, "Will you not come and look at baby?—she looks so pretty when she is asleep;" and she followed mechanically to the cot where the lovely Constance was lying, not asleep, for she had just opened her large blue eyes, and, with the deep flush of slumber still upon her solemn, plump cheeks, she stretched out her little fat arms to Edith.

"Is she not a darling?" said Edith, with a loving pride, that was a little checked by the cold "Yes" that was the only answer.

She did not know that at that moment Helena Bertram was feeling, with a bitterness that Edith could not have understood, that she had not even a baby to stretch out its arms to her and love her; and that she longed to be alone in her little room at home, that she might throw herself down and weep, as she had often done lately when none could hear her.

Poor Helena! she had lost her mother before she could have known her, and her father, rendered morose and eccentric by his loss, brought his child up in a manner that rendered her dreamy, self-willed, sensitive, and unfit for active intercourse with the world. Most of his day was spent in his library alone; then Helena was either coiled up in a corner of the same room, poring over any book she had chosen to take down from the shelves, or she was roaming in the neglected grounds or quiet lanes beyond, known to every one that she was likely to meet there, and respected as "poor little Miss Bertram, from the Court."

She saw her neighbours also every week at church, and two or three times she had been invited to take tea at the rectory, but she disliked the boys, who were the only children there, and easily persuaded her papa to decline all other invitations for her.

As for education, Sarah had taught her to sew, and having of late years been roused to the necessity of her learning something, her father had devoted an hour or two every day to instructing her in the rudiments of learning, whilst he kept looking forward to the necessity, which he fully acknowledged, of giving her

an education which would better fit her for the station which her wealth would entitle her to fill.

But Helena knew nothing of this; she was content to live with her father, and know of no other life; and when the one object of her affection was wrenched from her by death, she was stunned, and only wished that she could die also. But time showed her that there were other troubles following, and none she could have felt more acutely than the having to leave the Court and live amongst strangers.

At first, she positively refused to do so, and it was only when convinced by Sarah and the rector that opposition was useless; for the Court was let, and Sarah and all the servants were going too, that she yielded a passive consent, and allowed herself to be removed.

"But Sarah," she said, "you shall not leave me," and that was the one spark of comfort that she carried away with her, and although the old woman shook her head, and said it was impossible, Helena was still confident that Sarah might remain with her at Oak-ridge.

And all the time that she was standing in the nursery, with the little things looking shily at her, and Percy thrusting a broken wooden horse into her hand as a pledge of friendship, Helena was studying Mrs. Ellersley, and watching for an opportunity of telling her that she quite intended to keep Sarah.

This opportunity was long in coming. Helena was taken into the pretty green room, and told that it was to be her own; but Edith looked much disappointed to find that she did not care about it; however, she remembered that her mamma had said

that Miss Bertram would probably be different from other girls ; and whilst Sarah was helping her young mistress to take off her wraps and change her travelling dress, Edith went down to Marian, and persuaded her to go back with her when she went to summon their young guest to tea, at which their papa and mamma, and Willie, were already assembled.

Helena followed them down stairs and was introduced to her guardian. She gave him one of her quiet, earnest looks, and then sat down to tea with the others ; but her presence was a great restraint, and Willie even whispered to his mother, " Will she go away soon ? " After tea the girls brought their best books and some puzzles and games out for her amusement, but a languid smile was all the sign of interest that she showed ; and her heavy eyes and unhappy countenance were so hopeless altogether, that Mrs. Ellersley at last proposed that she should go to bed.

As she assented to this with more eagerness than she had shown for any other proposal, Edith was told to bring a candle, and show her friend up stairs.

" I will come and see you soon," said Mrs. Ellersley, as she bid her " Good-night " affectionately ; and Helena left the room, followed by her little candle-bearer, who, by the time they reached the pretty green room, had recovered sufficiently to chatter freely about the beauty of it in summer, and how much nicer to have her there than Lou, who used to waken in the night, and cry for nurse and Bessie.

But Edith might as well have talked to the dressing-table : the moment she stopped, Helena said, " Please can I have Sarah ? " And Edith, feeling herself dismissed, said she would go and call her ; and,

bidding Helena "Good-night!" with a strong doubt as to whether she ought not to have kissed her, ran away.

If Edith could have looked back and seen how different the stiff, uncordial Helena was, as soon as she found herself alone with her old friend, she would have been surprised. Full of passionate grief, she clung to the old servant, and protested that she should never leave her; and Sarah, thinking it better not to contradict her when she was so tired, soothed her and caressed her with a fondness that at last had some effect, and Helena allowed herself to be put to bed; and then declining Sarah's offer of remaining with her, prepared, apparently, to go to sleep.

But it was not really so. With feverish anxiety she was watching for Mrs. Ellersley's promised visit; and when that lady came, she found Helena with flushed cheeks and bright eyes, wide awake.

"I am afraid that you are too tired to sleep," said Mrs. Ellersley, kindly. "This room is all so new to you."

"No, ma'am," said Helena, "but I wanted to speak to you."

"What is it, my dear?" said Mrs. Ellersley, coming nearer.

"I wish to keep Sarah with me," replied Helena; "I cannot do without her."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Ellersley, astonished at this demand, "it is impossible. Sarah has arranged to live with her widowed brother, as I dare say you know."

"But she would rather live with me," said Helena.

"She loves you very much, I am sure," said Mrs. Ellersley; "but she would not be quite comfortable

here. She could not stay without being my servant, too, and I do not want another servant. But do not fret yourself, my dear, about losing your good old friend. We will ask her to come and see you, when she has a holiday, and I hope that in the mean time you will find so many friends amongst us, that you will not feel the want of her. Now, good-night; and get well rested by to-morrow morning."

"Good-night," said Helena, in a firm voice; but the moment Mrs. Ehlersley had left the room, she gave vent to her disappointment, and would have screamed had she not remembered that both Edith and Marian were within hearing.

When she had cried a good deal, however, she resolved that she would make one more effort to free herself, and it was in the midst of arranging how to make this effort certainly successful that she fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

WHILST Edith was wondering, the next morning, whether she might just give a little tap at her neighbour's door, and Marian was saying she had better not, they were both startled by the appearance of the quaint old servant, in a close black gown and mob cap, who, begging pardon for coming through their room, quickly disappeared in the next, and never came out again whilst they remained up stairs.

This was old Sarah, who, to her great surprise, was

greeted by a most extraordinary proposition from her young lady.

"Sarah, I have made up my mind ; so don't try to persuade me from it. I cannot stay in this place without you ; so I shall come and live with you in London. I shall not care for your being poor, or anything ; so take me with you, and then, when my uncle returns to England, we can go back to the Court, and live all together."

"Oh, my darling," said the old woman, wiping her eyes, "it breaks my heart to hear you taking things in this way. It is true that, with my will, you and me should not be parted ; but you couldn't go and live in a dirty little street in London, that's a young lady born and bred. It will be a great change for me, my dear ; but Joseph, with his seven motherless little ones, calls me, and I must go, and glad if I can help him, poor thing, in his troubles ; but for you, Miss Helena, it would be quite impossible."

"Then you don't want me, Sarah," said Helena, turning away, quite broken down with this last blow.

"Bless your affectionate heart, Miss Helena. I wish only that I could keep you with me ; but since it is not to be, just set yourself to be happy here till Sir John comes home. This is a pretty place, though nothing like so grand as our Court ; and Mrs. Ellersley is as kind a lady as ever stepped, I should say. And the dear children, and the baby—my heart warmed to that baby ; and I thought of you lying on my lap, thirteen years ago, gone last 13th of September. I guess that Mrs. Nurse is a bit snappy at times ; but it is that fat lump of a Bessie that has to wait upon

the young ladies, I find, so you'll do very well, only keep your heart up, my dear child."

But Helena would not keep her heart up; and when she at last slowly descended to the breakfast-room, in answer to the summons of the great gong in the hall, she took with her the same look of hidden sorrow and pale suffering that had distressed them so much the night before.

Mrs. Ellersley sighed, whilst she spoke kindly to her; and the children were divided between sympathy for her unhappiness and disappointment in finding her such a dismal addition to their circle. As for Captain Ellersley, he was occupied with some news from the War-office, and, except to place a large slice of ham upon her plate, he took no notice of his silent ward, and went to his study directly after breakfast.

Then Edith and Marian made a fuss, and brought out books, and inkstand, and paper, and began to be very industrious. It was true that every morning, since they had ceased having a daily governess, their mamma had devoted two or three hours to them, when she was not disturbed by a summons from the kitchen or the nursery; but this morning a love of display made them more than usually studious.

Their mamma, however, very soon came to tell Helena that Sarah was waiting to bid her good-bye; and, as soon as she had left the room, there was a good deal more talk than work—on Edith's part, at least. She was supposed to be writing a copy, but it was accompanied by a running commentary like this,—

"Well, Marian, now tell me how do you like her?"

"I can't tell yet, if you mean Miss Bertram," was Marian's reply.

"Of course I do, but can't you tell a little. I like her—at least I like the way she speaks, it is not common; and I like her eyes, sometimes they are so languid—soft, melting eyes, I should think Ernest will call them; then all at once they flash up, like lighting gas-lamps in a dark street. I am sure she is pretty. Mamma, don't you think that she is pretty?" inquired the little chatterer, as her mamma came back into the room.

"My dear Edith, I wish that you would attend to your copy, and talk a little less," was all the answer she received to her question. "I do not think your papa would praise that line," and Mrs. Ellersley pointed out some most irregular letters.

"Edith talks so that I cannot learn my French verb at all, mamma," said Marian, always ready to complain; "she thinks so much of a new person."

"I am sure, Marian, you shook the table when I was making that capital D so badly," retorted Edith.

"Hush, hush, my dears," said Mrs. Ellersley, gently; and they obeyed her for a few minutes. Then Edith, recovering her spirits, said, in her usual tone,—

"Mamma, may I go and ask Miss Bertram, if she will not come down stairs? I heard the carriage go away some time ago."

"Call her, Helena, my dear," said Mrs. Ellersley; "it will make her feel more at home with us. Perhaps one of you had better look after her. You may go, Marian."

"Oh, mamma, I should not know what to say," said Marian, with a shrug of her shoulders.

Edith waited only for a half-permission from her mother's eyes, and then ran merrily ran up stairs. But when she reached her own room she was stopped by hearing sounds of grief proceeding from the inner one—violent sobs, and cries of, "Oh, papa, why could I not die with you!" and Edith's heart melted in sympathy with such deep sorrow. She scarcely dared to intrude upon it; but, as she hesitated, the latch slipped in her hand, and the door opened a little. Helena was lying on the floor, close to the window, in an attitude of misery. The moment the door opened she started up, and Edith was obliged to go in.

"What have you come here for?" she said, in a low, decided voice, very different from the passionate cry that Edith had heard from her just before.

"I only came," faltered Edith—then her sympathy for Helena overcame her fear, and seizing her hand, she said, with her eyes full of tears, "You must be so miserable!"

"Are you crying for me?" said Helena, in a tone of surprise.

"I was so sorry," said Edith, in an apologizing way; but Helena had now sat down in the window, and was quietly leaning her head upon her hand, and Edith did not disturb her.

At last Helena looked up, and said again—

"So you were sorry for me. You are Edith, are you not? I like you—you are different from the others."

"And I like you," said Edith warmly, all her

natural vivacity returning. "I knew I liked you. I told Marian so."

"I hate Marian," said Helena.

Edith started.

"You need not look shocked, little one; I like you, and that is enough. Let us go down stairs;" and, resuming her stiff, indifferent manner, she entered the library with no traces of her violent grief, except her reddened eyelids and the dark lines under them, and received Mrs. Ellersley's attempts at consolation in silence.

Chiefly for the sake of leaving them at liberty to amuse their sad companion, Mrs. Ellersley soon excused the rest of their lessons, and gave a holiday for the remainder of the day. Edith ran to the window, to see if there was a chance of their going out, but that was hopeless. The rain was still coming down in a quiet, determined way; the walks were dark and soaked with wet; and the brown, softened leaves, were silently falling from the trees and shrubs. No chance of going out to-day; and Marian, having quickly ascertained that fact, had taken up an entertaining book, and established herself in a low chair near the fire, and was no help at all."

"Oh dear!" cried Edith, "what shall we do? Oh," she added, more cheerfully, "we will go up to the nursery, and play with the children. Nurse is sure to be rather cross, and it will be such fun. Won't you come, Marian?"

"I want to finish this story," replied Marian.

"Then, Miss Bertram—I mean Helena, you will?" said Edith, coaxingly.

Helena would much rather not; but she did not

want to be left alone with Marian ; so she allowed herself to be led into the warm, comfortable nursery, where they were greeted with noisy rapture.

Edith was soon engaged in a boisterous game, and Helena was glad to stand beside the window, where she looked out earnestly for some minutes, without seeing anything. But the good old nurse, who, although she sometimes declared that the children were more plague to her than all her money, was, in reality very kind-hearted, and was very anxious to make the stranger look a little happier, so she said, after Helena had enjoyed a few minutes' dreaming, " Won't you come near the fire, my dear ? there are not many more comfortable firesides than our nursery, as I said to your nurse last night, and she agreed with me."

The mention of Sarah, made Helena feel choked ; but she looked round to see the comfortable fireside, and then she moved slowly to the seat nurse pointed out to her ; and, in a few minutes more, she actually had the baby on her lap—the soft, fat, cooing baby. It reminded her of her own old doll that she used to love so long ago, and her heart warmed to the little creature. For a time she forgot her troubles ; and once, when the little boys, in their game, were coming too near, she cried out, " Take care, Willie !" as naturally as if she had lived there for years. I do not think she ever felt really so lonely after she had had the baby in her arms ; and many a day, when she was unhappy, she used to steal into the nursery, and take the low chair beside the high green guard, and nurse used to give her the baby to hold, and she was comforted.

And, after all, this first dreary day was not so in-

supportable ; for, in the afternoon, they found a nice book for her ; it was actually Marian that suggested it ; and, with all the charms of novelty for her,—for she had scarcely ever had any story-books to read,—the joys and sorrows of “ Anna Ross ” wiled away her mind from dwelling upon her own, till bedtime came, when she was too much tired to go through her grief again.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER day of the rainy season, with its riots, and its mischiefs, and its pettishness and squabbings, would have been unbearable to the elder folks, at least ; so it was fortunate that the sun shone brightly the next morning, and there was a prospect of the ground being dried sufficiently for them to get out at last.

But there was time enough for lessons before then ; and even Helena was called upon to join, so far, at least, as giving some account and specimen of her acquirements went. These were certainly of a varied and rather unusual nature. Mrs. Ellersley found that she read well, and wrote a good manly hand. Murray's grammar she had never seen, but she was as far in Henry's first Latin book as Ernest had been when he went to school, and she knew a little French. She could sew, but hated it, she said ; drawing and music she knew nothing about, except that she could draw a plan with rule and compasses, and she liked to

hear the organ played better than almost anything in the world.

It was some comfort to find that she had not been quite neglected ; and Mrs. Ellersley's proposal to teach her with the others was received, at least, without repugnance. But by this time the sunshine had become too much for Edith, and at last she jumped up, and said,—

"Oh, do, dear mamma, excuse us the rest of this nasty geography ; for it is quite dry now, and I want to show Helena our gardens."

This plea would scarcely have been sufficient, but Marian added that of a bad headache ; and as Mrs. Ellersley thought it might arise from being shut up so long, she yielded, and the books were closed and laid aside.

But Helena thought them great babies, and that it was mean to plead headache. She had had one since yesterday ; and, with a look of scorn she declined going to see the gardens, because she wanted to read the rest of "Anna Ross ;" and no persuasions could make her change her mind.

"I do not choose to go out," she said ; and there was an end of the matter, except that Marian said—

"Never mind, Edith ; we shall be much better without her ;" and foolish little Edith, always too ready to follow a decided lead for good or ill, said,—

"Yes, that we shall !" and left Helena alone, with a strong impression of her loneliness.

She had sat this way for some time, not reading, as she had intended, but brooding upon her troubles ; and so engrossed by them that she had never noticed the entrance of a new member of the family. This

was Ernest, who had just arrived for his weekly holiday, and proceeding at once to the library, had popped his head in, intending to startle somebody; but seeing only a stranger, he waited for a moment. Not but what he had a pretty good guess who it was; but seeing her alone and crying, he hesitated before approaching her.

Helena, however, heard his step, and looked up.

"Can you tell me where my mother and sisters are?" said Ernest, gently.

"I don't know," answered Helena, in her deepest tone and stiffest manner.

"I dare say I shall soon find them," said Ernest, as he turned away.

"Mamma! Marian! Edie!" shouted from the hall in different keys, producing no reply, Ernest proceeded to the garden, where he soon found his sisters, engaged in earnest conversation, with gardening tools and flower roots lying neglected by their side. The well-known shrill whistle made them start and run quickly along the walk to meet him, when he received their salutations with regal indifference, and asked where his mother was.

But Edith was not going to let him escape so soon; she had too much to ask and tell, and whilst Marian asked quietly, "Have you seen her?"—meaning Helena, of course,—Edith began:

"Oh, Ernest! have you come? what for?—how nice; but it isn't Saturday; you must have had a holiday. Helena has come; she is not a bit like what I thought she would be. Marian doesn't like her. Oh, Ernest! have you come to stay?"

"Take breath, Edie, and give me a chance of answer-

ing you," said Ernest, laughing. "There is a fellow from our school has been so kind as to go and get something—I am not clear what,—only Mr. Barnard made us a speech, and gave us a holiday, and I got leave to come home. Jolly! is it not? Where is mamma?"

"In the nursery, I believe," said Marian; "but she is so disagreeable, Ernest."

"Who!—Mamma?" cried Ernest, in pretended horror.

"No," exclaimed both the girls, half laughing, half shocked at the idea, whilst Edith continued,—

"She is so queer-looking, with such large dark eyes; she darts them at Marian sometimes like fire; and she speaks almost like a boy, only soft; and she has never learned music; but she writes as well as papa, very nearly; and she wouldn't come out with us this morning, and Marian thinks it is because she is proud, but I think it is because she is sorrowful." Edith ventured to express her own opinion, now that Ernest was by.

"I think so too," said Ernest; "and I'll tell you what, girls, I don't think you can have been over-and-above kind to her; for I found her just now in the library, looking the picture of misery."

"You have seen her, then?" exclaimed both his sisters.

"Yes, alone, and crying," repeated Ernest.

"She never lets us see her cry," said Edith, in an injured tone; "and she wouldn't come when we asked her."

"She probably has not been accustomed to a little romp like you, Edie," said her brother, with an air of

superiority. "However, come back with me to the house, and help me to find mamma."

"Oh, Ernest! will you go to Bathurst with us this afternoon?" said Edith.

"Yes, do?" said Marian; "then we can see the St. John again. She likes pictures; perhaps that may brighten her a little." Marian had been roused up into thinking that perhaps they really had not been very kind to the stranger.

But Ernest would not give any answer to the proposition at present; and his sisters followed him, as they were accustomed to do, into the nursery, where they were amused spectators of their mamma's surprise and the children's delight at his appearance. Then they followed him into his own little room downstairs, where stuffed birds, and worms, and fishing lines, and bats and balls, and chemical apparatus, and fencing-sticks, were allowed to lie about in uninterrupted disorder; and they watched him carefully add another to his store of birds' eggs, and pitied, for the fiftieth time, the mother that had been robbed.

"Such nonsense!" Ernest said, "when it was one that Jennings found in an old nest that the hard-hearted bird had deserted."

The next step was to the pigeon cote, and it was in going there that they first remembered Helena; and Ernest, in spite of Marian's assertions that she would not care about them, insisted upon her being at least invited to join the expedition. He did not admit the fact, but it was rather a relief when Edith came back to say that Helena was in the nursery, and did not want to come, so that they could go and enjoy themselves in their own way.

The scheme of walking to Bathurst was not suffered to fall to the ground: indeed, Edith talked so much about it at dinner that she made her papa angry with her; and this was a serious matter, for they had intended to ask him to go with them, and now nobody had the courage to do so. It would have been little use asking him, however, because, as they soon found, he was going to ride in quite a different direction; but their mamma willingly agreed to go with them, on condition that the little ones were taken too. Marian and Ernest were sometimes apt to think the children a bore in their walks with their mamma.

However, in their donkey-carriage, with Willie driving, whip in hand, and fat Bessy panting after them, the children could hardly be considered in the way, and Ernest could keep close to his mother, and talk to her, even though Helena Bertram was on the other side. For Helena was evidently not listening to their conversation, and only walked beside Mrs. Ellersley that she might be quiet.

The walk to Bathurst was one of their favourite excursions, and generally reserved for a holiday and Ernest. They might have got into the park any day by wading and scrambling across the stream at the bottom of their own garden; but the proper way, which they now went by, was through a little gate at the extremity of their grounds, which led them into a narrow lane, where the old green turf showed how rarely it was trodden except by the light-footed company that were passing through it now; and at the end of the lane they came to the brook again, which they crossed by means of a wooden bridge, overgrown

with moss and yellow lichen, and then they were in the park.

But, avoiding the open road, they kept beside the stream, which now was wider, and at one side had a rocky bank from which ivy, ferns, and mountain-ash were hanging down, until they reached a waterfall, where they always stood awhile to watch and wonder at the rushing water and the foaming spray.

It was from the large pond, or lake above, that the water rushed so furiously; and there were swans on the lake, and an island in the middle; and it was only because there was no proper boat, and, therefore, they had never been allowed to go to the island, that there had been no desolate Robinson Crusoes there,—for the scene had often been enacted in the children's imagination, and always upon that island.

At the end of the lake they turned into a wood, through which a broad overgrown carriage-drive led them to the hall. This was the part that they liked almost the best. To turn out of the bright sunshine into the deep shade of the wood, to feel the cold chill that crept over them, and to trample on the fresh-fallen leaves, with their pleasant autumn smell,—all this was in harmony with Helena's feelings, and she almost enjoyed it.

Tall shrubs,—arbutus, box-tree, and laurels,—mingled with the higher trees, and, as well as the remains of the broken-down arbours and rustic trees, showed that the place had once been cared for; whilst the soft cooing of the wood-pigeons in the distance, and the rustling of the hares and smaller animals near at hand, showed how little they were troubled with human beings now.

From the wood they came out into a glade of soft turf that sloped down towards the house, and when Helena saw the old Elizabethan building, with its gabled roofs, its deep mullioned windows, the bell-tower, and the large old porch, she echoed inwardly Edith's usual exclamation when they walked to Bathurst, "Oh, mamma! I wish that we lived at the Hall, instead of at Oakridge; don't you?" "But now, Helena, come and see the garden," cried Edith.

The house was surrounded on three sides by a broad high terrace, protected by ornamental balustrades, below which a green bank of turf sloped gently to the park.

Where the garden had once been, under the great bay windows of the drawing-room, was now rank grass; but in the midst of it, here and there, old-fashioned flowers sprang up, sweet, but wild, in their luxuriance; and late though the season was, a profusion of woodbine and large roses trailed over the balustrades, and even up the stems of two great yew-trees, that were cut in the form of peacocks, and guarded each side of the flight of steps that led down from the garden into the park.

The children sat here awhile, and made garlands of the flowers; but soon they remembered that they had wished to see the inside of the house, and show Helena the "St. John." There was a large walled garden behind the house, which, for the sake of profit, was kept in better order than the rest, and Mrs. Ellersley wanted some fruit from it; so she went round to the cottage where the gardener lived, and promised that she would ask old Betty for the key. A train of impatient young ones followed her; but

there was nothing but disappointment for them. A little boy, with a baby in his arms, sitting upon a stone before the door, was the only person about the place, and he seemed able to say nothing but "I don't know." Ernest was inclined to pummel some sense into the little stupid; but Mrs. Ellersley, by gentler means, at last contrived to discover that the gardener was at market, and his mother had gone out shearing, and that she always took the key with her, for fear of any harm happening to the furniture and things.

No chance of "hide and seek" in the old hall to-day, or of showing the pictures to Helena; but there would be plenty of opportunities afterwards, Mrs. Ellersley said, so they must make themselves content outside; and she added, that she was going to see an old man at the other lodge, but would soon return to them.

Ernest was quite proud to find that his dear mother was ready to accept his escort and lean upon his arm, and the three girls were left together amongst the roses, whilst the little ones were playing about, and Master Willie annoying Bessie by kicking with all the might of his new winter boots at the massive hall-door.

"How provoking!" exclaimed Marian, when her mamma and Ernest had gone. "Are you fond of pictures, Helena?"

"I don't know," answered Helena, shortly.

"Have you ever seen any?" asked Marian, surprised.

"Our dining-room at home was full of them," said Helena, "and the staircase; but they were all people

that I did not know or care about, except one ;"—and as Helena alluded to this one, the whole room came vividly before her, and the portrait of her mother over the fireplace, with that angel face, that had always seemed to her so beautiful, until she could fancy herself sitting in the evening beside her father, and he gazing upon that picture, which he never talked about, and giving a deep sigh as the radiance of the evening light gradually faded from it, and at last the darkness hid it altogether ; and she did not hear what her companions were saying, until Edith started up, and said—

"Do let us try, Marian ; it would be delicious—far nicer than going in with that cross old woman, who will scarcely let us touch anything."

It appeared that the girls were considering whether they could not enter the house by some unlocked door or window, and there was so much to tempt in the scheme, that Helena restrained the rising tears, entered into it readily, and set off with them on a voyage of discovery.

A good many doors and windows were pushed and pulled in vain ; but once engaged in the adventure, they would not give it up, but going round to the back, they entered a sort of court-yard that had several rooms and small buildings opening out of it. One of these was dark and cool, and seemed to have been a sort of dairy, and in one corner was an old door, which at once attracted their attention. Marian pushed it, and fancying that it gave way a little, called on the rest to help her. They willingly added their strength to hers, and, to their delight, the half-rotten wood gave way ; and leaving the lock still fast, the door burst

open, nearly throwing them over each other into a dark passage that was beyond.

They only laughed merrily, never remembering for a moment that if a policeman should have happened to be near, they would have stood in some danger of being taken up for housebreaking.

"You may go first, Marian," said Edith; but for once Marian was quite willing to cede her privilege, and let the braver Edith lead the way, and in single file they followed through the long, dark passage, and round a corner, which led them into a wider one, and by this time their eyes were accustomed to the dim light, and they saw before them another door. This door was already a little ajar, and turning noisily on its rusty hinges, it admitted them into a lofty kitchen, empty, dirty, and deserted. Their clear young voices were loudly echoed as they stood to determine their course. One door led them into another kitchen, another took them into passages and closets, and they were almost bewildered by the time that they arrived at the foot of a stone staircase; but this must lead them up stairs, as Helena remarked.

"Of course it must," cried Edith, and laughed.

They skipped up the steps, found that the door at the top swung back at their bidding, and, to their great joy, that it gave them entrance into the great hall, where they were at once upon well-known ground.

They were giving vent to their delight, when a loud knocking startled them, and made their own hearts beat loudly. But in another minute a second volley reassured them—it was only Willie still trying this unlikely method of obtaining entrance; and subduing their merriment, that he might not hear them,

they peeped into several of the large rooms that opened out of the hall, and then went to their grand *bonne-bouche*, the drawing-room. It was an immense room; but the shutters were closed, and the light could only steal in through chinks and cracks.

"When Betty is here, she opens us the shutters; but look, Helena, there is quite enough light for you to see the face. Is it not beautiful? It is St. John and the Lamb—don't you see his crook and the light? Papa says that it is only a copy, but that it is as good as the original, and he would have bought it long ago, only the gentleman will not sell anything, although he is very poor. He thinks that he shall come back here, but papa thinks that he will not live to do so, for he is very ill."

"I think he is right," said Helena; "I would not sell it, if it was mine, for anything."

The little stream of sunlight from a crack in the shutters was lighting up the saintly face, and Helena's soul was stirred by it. She did not know enough about holy things to enter into the purity and depth of the expression; but she had a natural love of the beautiful, and she thought that she could look at this for ever.

Edith called her attention to the wreaths and Cupids on the ceiling, and lifted up covers to afford her glimpses of the gold and crimson furniture, but Helena's eyes still wandered to the picture, and the first, and for some time the only, subject of sympathy between her and Marian was their common admiration of its beauty.

Edith could not enter into their feelings, but she was happy in her own way, and was telling a long

story, when Marian interrupted her, by remembering that their mamma would soon return, and that they must go and meet her. It was tiresome, because there was such a beautiful staircase, and many rooms up stairs to see; however, it could not be helped, and they began to retrace their steps, and descended to the lower regions, where everything was so dark, and damp, and dusty.

Helena led the way this time, and they had reached the passage from the kitchen, when, instead of taking the turn that would have brought them to the dairy, she went straight forward, without knowing that before her were two steps, down which she fell, with some force, against a door. It was well for her that the door was stronger than some that they had tried, or she might have been thrown down a whole flight of steps into the cellar. As it was, she was almost stunned, and could only groan at first.

"Oh, Helena! have you fallen?" "Are you hurt?" were the exclamations of her terrified companions.

"I think I have broken my leg," groaned Helena. "Oh, I wish Sarah was here."

"I will run and fetch mamma," said Edith, after vainly trying, with Marian's help, to lift Helena. The movement only made the tears stream down her cheeks, and she begged them to let her lie still.

"Yes—go, Edith, quick," said Marian, in despair, and Edith ran off; but she soon returned in dismay, for there was no one to be seen. Mamma, Ernest, Bessie, children, and donkey-carriage, all had gone; and even the stupid boy at the cottage had disappeared, and the door was locked, and there was nobody within call.

What was to be done? The light that shone from the latticed dairy window through the passage showed them Helena, pale and suffering.

"I will go home and tell them," said Edith, ever ready and active. "Perhaps I may overtake them; then we can bring the donkey-carriage back for Helena."

And thus it did happen that, in very different circumstances from any they could have fancied, Helena and Marian found themselves alone together.

CHAPTER V.

WE will leave them there, and follow Edith, who ran as fast as she was able through the wood, past the pond, and into their own green lane, without meeting any one. When she came within sight of home, it was a relief to see her papa and Ernest coming towards her. They quickened their steps when they saw Edith, and as soon as they were near enough, they eagerly inquired where she had been, and where she had left the other two.

Edith was almost breathless; but, as well as she was able, she explained that they were in the old hall, that Helena had fallen down, and, they were afraid, had broken her leg, and that Marian was staying with her.

This account was alarming enough, and Captain Ellersley only hesitated whether to turn back, and order the carriage, or to hasten on himself at once.

"It is such a long way round for the large carriage, papa," said Edith, "we thought the donkey-carriage would be best; I am sure Helena could ride in it."

"A good thought, Edie," said her father. "You run back, Ernest,—it is still standing in the yard; Richard can bring it at once, whilst you go on to the village for Mr. Parry."

And after giving these orders, Captain Ellersley took Edith by the hand, and proceeded quickly by a short route to the hall. They had reached the wood before he thought of asking Edith how the accident had happened. Her papa looked so much concerned, that Edith had not ventured to speak before; and now he was taking such long strides, that she had half to run to keep up with him, and could only answer in spasmodic jerks.

"You see, papa," she began, "mamma and Ernest had gone to see old Etherington, and we wanted to show Helena the 'St. John,' and we could not get the keys, because Betty was out; so we went round and round, till we found a door that we could push open; and then we went through the kitchen till we got up stairs; and we were coming back again when Helena slipped; and she looks very pale, and she is crying, and we didn't know what to do, because mamma and all of them had gone."

"Your mamma had gone home, and was much alarmed when she did not find you there," said Captain Ellersley. "It is a most unfortunate accident; but you had no business to go into the house by yourselves—Marian ought to have known better."

"Yes, papa," said Edith, in a repentant tone; "I very sorry that we went."

Her father did not reply, and she durst not speak again until they reached the narrow passage where Helena was lying, still in great pain, and Marian, much frightened, standing beside her.

Captain Ellesley lifted Helena in his strong arms very carefully, and after spreading his own coat upon the stone table in the dairy, laid her there to wait till Mr. Parry came, and talked kindly to her, to pass the time away. Ernest, however, had been so active, that it was not long before both he and the doctor and the vehicle had arrived; and before much more time had passed, Mr. Parry had examined into the extent of the injury, and Helena had been carefully packed into the donkey-carriage.

Her leg was not broken, but a small tendon was, and the ankle rather sprained and bruised; in fact, it was an awkward accident altogether, Mr. Parry said, and one that might lay her up for some time.

This unpleasant prospect seemed to make the pain worse to bear; and in spite of Ernest's kind attentions to her, she was very miserable all the way home; and still more so when she found that she had to be carried to bed at once, and might have to remain there for some days. Not all Mrs. Ellersley's tenderness, or nurse's skilful management, could prevent her from being so peevish and impatient, that she made herself ten times worse.

It certainly was an annoying termination to Ernest's holiday; but he, good-natured fellow, never thought of that, and his last words to Edith, when she bid him "Good-bye!" at the gate, for he would not let her go any farther, were,—

"Mind that you and Marian are kind to Miss

Bertram, Edie. It is a horrid thing for her; and you should help to make the time as little tedious as possible." This last speech put Edith's mind rather into a state of confusion, for, as she said to herself, "Poor Helena," as Ernest says; "it is a horrid thing for her. I wish that I could do anything for her; but he does not know how cross she is, only she must be so miserable, having no papa. Still it is no use, Marian says, trying to make her happy, for she is so tiresome; and I am sure, when Ernest was so kind to her all the way in coming from the hall, she said things just as gruffly to him as she does to us all, only he does not seem to mind."

And whilst Edith was thus reasoning with herself, the subject of her thoughts was lying in a state of discontent, easier as far as pain went, but determined to be pleased with nothing. Bessy had been sent to sit beside her, and was ordered away in pretty quick time.

"But, Miss Bertram, my mistress said I was to sit here, in case you wanted anything."

"But I don't choose to have you," replied Miss Bertram; "so you may go away."

Bessy was not accustomed to this kind of treatment, so she went and complained to her mistress, who excused Miss Bertram on the score of illness, and told Bessy that she might sit in the outer room instead, where she would be within call, if anything was really wanted. But this unamiableness on the part of Helena was a great check to the kindness that the whole household felt towards her on account of her accident; and it retarded her recovery, so that it was two days before she was able even to be carried down stairs.

There she lay, chiefly on the sofa in the library window, from which she could see the garden, and Bathurst Park beyond; and at first she thought that it would be very pleasant to sit here alone, and have no one to tease her; but she soon became tired of it, and grew angry with her sprained ancle, and impatient with everybody.

The girls, who were very sorry for her, brought her flowers sometimes, and their nicest books, and then they were all very friendly together; but soon Edith would be thoughtless, and Marian would be pettish, and Helena would speak in a proud, angry way to them, and they, having the better of her, in the free use of their limbs, would go away, and leave her to her own devices. Then she would sink back into her most dolorous mood, wish for Sarah, and fancy that she hated everybody.

Things were going on in this way when Ernest came home, as usual, on the Saturday, and the first thing he did was to come and inquire after her most kindly; then, when he saw her look longingly through the window into the garden where the little ones were playing, he made Edith and Marian take hold of one end of the couch, whilst he took the other, and they carried her into the sweet fresh air, which was delightful to her, after being a prisoner so long. The children came flocking round her, and the baby held out its arms to her, and Helena felt happier than she had done for many a day; and Ernest went out to ride with his father, quite satisfied with the result of his experiment.

They were still in the garden all together, when a servant came to inquire for Mrs. Ellersley.

"Who wants her, Susan," asked Marian.

"Martha Baines, miss, from the village," answered Susan. "Her youngest girl has got sadly burnt, she says, and she wants to beg some old linen for her."

"Poor little thing!" cried Edith; "do let us seek mamma, Marian, and tell her about it."

"Your mamma has gone out walking, Miss Edith," said Bessy, who had just come near; but Miss Edith was out of hearing by this time, and Marian was following her.

So Susan returned to the kitchen, and Helena began to revolve in her mind how she could help the poor woman. She had seen her papa give a sovereign to people who came to beg of him, and, although she had only three pounds in her possession, she thought she would send one of them to the poor woman; but her money was in her writing-desk, and her writing-desk was in the library, and Bessy had now taken the baby, and had gone away with it, quite to the other end of the garden, and there was no one to send for it. Helena could have cried with vexation; when suddenly the thought struck her that she might go herself. She did not forget that Mr. Parry had said that she should not attempt to walk, but she considered herself a great deal better, and she also thought herself the best judge; and, quick as the idea came, she sprung up from her couch, and stepped lightly upon the ground. She had not gone three paces, when, to her mortification, her foot gave way beneath her, and she fell down. The pain was sharp, and it was all she could do to get back upon the couch; but, too anxious about her design to heed the pain, she looked round again, and, seeing Willie just

moving in sight, she called to him,—“Willie, will you bring my writing-desk out of the library?”

Willie, quite proud of the commission, ran to fetch it. The desk was standing upon the low shelf of a what-not, so the little boy had no difficulty in reaching it; and carrying it, most carefully, in both arms, he was proceeding along the passage with his burden, when his foot caught in the edge of a thick mat, and he fell heavily against a figure of Joan of Arc that stood upon a pedestal at the corner of the hall. The Joan of Arc was thrown with a loud crash upon the stone floor, and at that moment Marian came down stairs.

The desk was no worse, apparently, and Willie, faithful to his charge, had picked it up directly, and was gazing ruefully at the ruined heroine, when Marian seized him with no gentle hand, and exclaimed,—

“You naughty boy; you are always in some mischief or other.”

Willie was so startled that he loosened his hold of the desk, and it fell again, this time not without injury, for a corner was chipped off, and a piece of the brass inlaid work loosened. Now, Willie thought even more of the injury to the desk that he had been trusted with, than of the breaking of the figure; and, angry at Marian as the cause of the last accident, he burst into a loud roar, and began to kick her with all his might.

Marian's dignity was not proof against this treatment, and a struggle began, which would probably have ended in Willie's being overpowered, had not his mamma, with little Percy, just entered upon the scene.

"My dear Marian, what is this?" said Mrs. Ellersley, in a grieved tone, as she came into the passage from the porch-door. "Willie, you must not treat your sister so. Come to me."

Percy, running up at this moment with the gilt sword of Joan of Arc in his hand, showed the extent of the mischief that had been done.

Marian's complaints were loud immediately; but Willie's indignant remonstrances were no less so, and, except that Helena had sent him for her writing-desk, it was impossible to understand the story. Perhaps Helena could throw some light upon it; so to Helena Mrs. Ellersley proceeded, followed by the combatants, Willie still carrying the shattered desk.

But it was not much easier to gain a cool explanation here. Helena, flushed and impatient, saw at once that her desk was broken.

"Marian shook me, and it fell," said Willie, still indignant, and it needed no more.

Helena, already irritated by pain, threw her flashing eyes on Marian, and, without waiting for further explanation, burst into a torrent of passionate reproaches.

"You try to injure me in every way. You are mean, and take advantage of my not being able to move; but I did not come here to be insulted. My own papa would not have allowed it, and I will not stay. I have never had a moment's happiness since I came into the house, and I hate everybody in it."

Such were a few of the violent and exaggerated speeches that poured from the lips of Helena Bertram, and fell upon the ears of the gentle lady who had

been so kind to her, and who was now terrified by her vehemence.

"Hush! Helena," she said; "it is very wrong to give way to your anger, and Marian did not mean to vex you, particularly when you are ill; it was an accident. Hush! my child;" and Helena, a little ashamed of her violence, was taking refuge in a flood of tears, when Bessy came up to them in a great hurry.

"Please, ma'am, Miss Edith, she would go to her drawers, and pull the things about, and get some clothes out to give to Martha Baines; and one of her children is in the small-pox, and cook is quite frightened, ma'am, that Miss Edith will have caught the infection."

"Martha Baines," cried Mrs. Ellersley, in bewilderment, for she knew nothing about it; "where is she? Has Miss Edith been in the village?"

"No; in the kitchen, ma'am; Martha Baines is there," returned Bessy.

To the kitchen Mrs. Ellersley hastened, and there heard the whole story. Martha Baines was a poor widow in the village, who had often received kindness from Mrs. Ellersley. She had a large family, and her eldest daughter had just been sent home from service in the small-pox, and in the confusion of attending upon her, the others had to be neglected, and the youngest child had got to the fire and burnt itself. On hearing her request for old linen, Edith had, as Bessy said, rushed to her drawers, half emptied them upon the floor, until she had found some old things that she had heard her mamma say would soon be too much worn to wear, and had hastened to the

kitchen, where she was pressing them on the poor woman's acceptance, when cook, knowing the circumstances, had torn her away, and told the woman to leave the house. Edith was now in Mrs. Nurse's hands, and after she had given orders for one of the men to take some assistance to the poor woman's house, with strict orders that she was never to enter the precincts of Oakridge again for the present, Mrs. Ellersley proceeded to Edith's room, where, amidst the untidiness that she had occasioned, that young lady was undergoing the washing, re-dressing, and scolding that nurse considered necessary for her welfare.

"You're shocked, ma'am, and I do not wonder," said Mrs. Nurse, looking up in the midst of her occupation. "There never were such children for getting into mischief. It seems not a minute since I had my eye upon them all from the nursery window; the young ladies sitting on the seat with Miss Louisa, and Miss Bertram nursing the baby as she is so fond of, and Bessy standing by; and in five minutes there is such a shandrydan in the house—Master Willie tripping himself up in the hall, and Miss Marian flying at him, poor little darling! and then—Miss Edith, do stand still, for one minute, if you please—Miss Edith, running headlong into infection, and bringing the small-pox into the house. It's no use crying, Miss Edith, and saying 'you didn't know,' when you might be the death of the poor dear baby, you might."

Now, although Mrs. Ellersley was very much grieved, and not quite comfortable about the risk of infection, she did not think that Edith had been in

so much danger as nurse considered ; but she was very much distressed at the naughtiness of the children, and when Captain Ellersley returned from his ride, and had heard the whole story, she quite agreed with his final verdict.

"It is impossible, my dear, to let things go on much longer in this way."

"I know, Arthur," said Mrs. Ellersley, who was now lying quite exhausted upon the sofa in her dressing-room, "and I feel that I am not doing my duty to the children ; and now that we have this poor dear child, Helena, added to our own, I do think I am scarcely equal to the responsibility. I hope, however, that I shall soon be a little stronger."

"Not strong enough to cope with these unruly spirits?" said Captain Ellersley. "It is no use concealing it, the children are all spoilt, and we must have a good, strict governess for them."

"Not a very strict one, Arthur, just at first," pleaded Mrs. Ellersley.

"They will be ruined, otherwise," said Captain Ellersley, in an unaltered voice, walking to the window.

There was silence for a few minutes ; then Mrs. Ellersley said,—

"Arthur, I know what I will do,—I will write to Bertha ; she will understand exactly what we want. She is sure to know of somebody. I will write to Bertha to-morrow."

"It will be a good plan," said the captain, tersely, from the window, and no more was said.

Almost directly afterwards Ernest came into the room.

"Mamma, Edwards wishes to know what time you want the carriage to-night."

"Oh, my love, that horrid dinner party! I cannot go,—it is impossible."

"Nonsense, my dear!" said her husband, coming near; "you will feel quite well enough, after you have had an hour's rest."

"But the children,—I cannot leave them," said Mrs. Ellersley.

"You have often left them before," said Captain Ellersley, rather impatiently; "what difference is there now? You can send them all to bed before you go, if that will make you happier."

"It would not make them much happier, I am afraid," said Mrs. Ellersley, with a smile and a sigh. "And there is Helena, too,—the dear girl puzzles me sadly, and she grieves me too. I thought her moping and stupid until this afternoon, but now she terrifies me."

"There is a great deal of good in Helena Bertram, mamma," said Ernest; "but if she bothers you, why don't you send her to school."

"My dear," replied Mrs. Ellersley, "your papa does not wish it,—nor should I like to treat her differently from my own girls, poor thing! and, indeed, they generally are all very good, only this afternoon things have gone wrong, and that makes me not like to leave them."

"Oh, I'll keep them all in order, mamma," said Ernest; "trust them to me. Have I not been a monitor for the last two years? Rely upon me for keeping the young ladies quiet."

"But you must not pommel them, my boy," said his father, laughing.

"You need not be afraid, papa," said Ernest. "I assure you we act by moral force almost entirely. The monitors rarely have to touch a boy. When we do pitch into one, though, he does not forget it in a hurry."

"Well," said his father, smiling, "you seem to have studied the subject, so I hope that your mother will be satisfied."

"You will leave me full powers, and the keys of the tea-chest, mother, dear, won't you?" said Ernest, kissing his mother affectionately; "then I will be off, for I heard signals of a squall before I came up stairs!" and so saying, Ernest left the room, and, in his capacity of chief constable, hastened to the library.

CHAPTER VI.

HE did not arrive too soon. Edith and Willie were already engaged in a small fight, occasioned by that young gentleman's desire to put Edith's white kitten up the chimney, to make it like a zebra, as he said. Fortunately, a guard was on the fire, or Willie might have been in a blaze; as it was, his woollen sleeve was singed, and Ernest perceived a strong smell of burning as soon as he opened the door of the room.

"Do you want to make roast-geese of yourself, you young ass?" he cried, seizing Willie by the arm.

"He wanted to put kitty up the chimney. He is so tiresome, Ernest," said Edith.

"I will put him up," said Ernest; and, suiting the action to the word, he took Willie in his arms, and, in spite of his violent kicks, was proceeding, apparently, to make a chimneysweep of him, when the boy's complete submission, and "I'll never do so any more, Ernest," stopped the execution, and, after a good shaking, Willie was set down upon the floor.

"Oh, Ernest!" cried Edith, "have you come to stay with us all the night? How nice! and you will not bring any of your great, stupid books out, will you?"

"That depends upon how you behave?" said Ernest, beginning to think how he had boasted about moral force to his father and mother, and how little he had acted upon it since he came down stairs.

Directly afterwards the lamp was brought in, and showed Marian standing in the window, with a book in her hand, though she could not have been reading for this half-hour, and Helena, lying on the couch, with her face turned away, her uneasy movements only showing that she was awake. She did not even turn round when tea came in, and said she did not want any.

Ernest, however, after he had put Marian in high good humour by his attentions to her, as she took her mamma's place at the tea-tray, proceeded to persuade Helena to let the couch be pushed up close to the table, so that she could join them comfortably; and having managed this with Willie's help, he proceeded to raise her up, and prop her with the cushions. The girls laughed to see how well Ernest

acted nurse ; but Helena gave a cry of pain, and turned very pale.

" Did I hurt your foot ? " cried Ernest. " I am so sorry."

" It was not your fault," said Helena, faintly.

Marian looked anxious and awkward ; she was sorry for Helena's suffering, but she did not know how to express it. Edith offered to run for all manner of things, or for nurse, to tell them what to do ; but Helena declined everything, and said that it had gone off ; and although she could not eat anything, she looked better, and joined a little in the fun and merriment that soon began.

Ernest had begun to think his task an easy one, until he was reminded that the evening was not yet over, by a little escapade of Willie's as the tea things were being taken out. He had secreted himself in the hall, and cried, " bo ! " as Susan was carrying the tea-tray out, so that she very nearly let it fall. But it did not fall, so Susan only said, " I shall tell your mamma of you, Master William ; " and Ernest ordered him to sit down and be quiet, and proceeded to arrange matters for his sisters.

" Have you no lessons to learn for Monday, girls ? "

" I can learn mine in a minute," said Edith ; " and, besides, it is no use,—we have hardly ever said any since Helena was ill, at least not every morning."

" Never mind that," said Ernest ; " you ought to have them ready."

" Oh ! Ernest, how cross you are," said Edith. " I wanted you to tell us some stories about school." She turned, however, to get her spelling-book, so Ernest got his writing-desk, and began to arrange some

papers in it, but he took care to observe that Helena had leaned wearily back upon the cushions, and that Marian had taken up her story-book again.

"Are you not going to follow Edie's example, Marian?" he asked, after a few minutes' silence.

Marian tossed her head at the idea of following little Edith's example, but she only said,—

"Mamma did not set me any lessons."

"Oh! Marian," said Edith, "you know you always do geography on Mondays."

"I wish you would be quiet, Edith," said Marian, testily; "you always interfere, and you have nothing to do with my lessons."

"Well, I never saw such girls," said Ernest. "If I were mamma, I would send you all off to school, or else I would get a tremendously strict governess for you; and that is what will be done, you may depend upon it."

"I shan't have a governess," said Willie, popping his head up from under the table; "I am going to school with you, Ernest."

"I shan't take you, Willie, until you are less of a baby than to play at 'bo!' with Susan," said Ernest; Edith laughed, and Marian said,—

"I wish we had a governess for some things."

"Oh! Marian," cried Edith, "if she was cross, would you wish it?"

"I was not thinking of that," said Marian; "but we should learn more. I do not mean a stupid creature, like Miss Moreland, with her 'Please, Miss Ellersley,' but a really clever governess."

"Oh! Marian," said Edith again; "but she would

not let us run about, or read story-books, or fish, or be with Ernest on Saturdays, or anything."

"You are such a baby," said Marian, contemptuously. "Of course, mamma would not let her interfere with our amusements."

"Ah, well, my ladies," said Ernest, "you'll see how it will be when Madam Sternface arrives. Poor creatures! how you will tremble at the sight of her. I will give you her portrait. She will be very tall and thin, with a meagre face, narrow mouth, and very little hair; green eyes and spectacles. She will wear a black silk dress, with a stiff white collar, and what-do-you-call-them wristbands; and she will say, 'Sit up, Miss Edith; make a curtsy when you enter the room, my love,'—they always say, 'My love,'—and then she will glare at you through her spectacles until you would fain sink into your own boots, and be carried away by Richard to brush by mistake. Won't she be delightful, Helena?" he added, turning to her.

"Not at all," answered Helena, decidedly; but she laughed at Ernest's nonsense, and that was what he wanted. "But you are only jesting."

"You will see," replied Ernest, in an oracular manner. "Do you not know that I am a prophet. Depend upon it, what I say will come true some day."

"Bessy says that a gipsy once told her that she would find something in a wood, and she always looks when we go to Bathurst," said Edith.

"How silly!" said Helena, in a low tone; whilst Edith continued,—

"And Bessy says that she knew a girl that had her

fortune told that she was to be drowned, so she would never go out in a boat ; and one day she was in a cart going across a river where it was very shallow, and the horse ran away, and she was thrown out into the water and drowned, after all."

"Ridiculous!" cried Ernest. "Why, Edith, you will believe in witches riding on broomsticks presently. Bessy must be an ignorant girl to tell you such stories."

"Mamma says that Edith ought not to talk to the servants ; but she doesn't care," put in Marian, kindly.

"Ah, well, wait till Madam Sternface has the care of you. Hallo, Helena! what is the matter?"

Helena had just given a groan that startled them all.

"It is only my ankle that hurts me so much," said Helena ; but she looked so pale now, that Willie was sent off at once for nurse, and they were all frightened.

"You are feverish, Miss Bertram," said nurse, as soon as she came into the room. "There has been too much backwards and forwards to-day for you ; you had better go to bed at once."

Helena was too faint to make any objection to this advice ; and Ernest, in his strong and willing arms, carried her up stairs. Edith held the candle, and Marian followed, sorry, in reality, but still too cross to show any sympathy. As soon as Helena was a little better, nurse turned them all out, saying that Miss Bertram would feel far better without them ; and their fears set at rest, by seeing her more comfortable, they raced merrily down stairs, and stopped

at the hall-door to look out at the stars, a favourite amusement with them when Ernest was at home; for then he could show them the pole star, and tell them the names of the constellations; and when Marian felt her brother's arm round her, she thought the old times had come back once more, and she began to laugh and talk again.

Then they went back into the library, and Marian pushed away the couch, and drew some chairs round the fire, and said, with an air of relief,—

"Now, do let us be comfortable, as we used to be, when papa and mamma were out."

"Well, I have no objection," said Ernest, taking the large chair in front of the fire between his sisters; "but I'll tell you what, girls, you don't behave well to Helena Bertram."

"Now, Ernest," said Marian, "why do you bring her name in, when we were just beginning to be comfortable without her? You have no idea how disagreeable she is."

"I have a good idea how unhappy she is," said Ernest; "and, I say again, you do not behave well to her."

"But she is so cross, sometimes," said Edith.

"And I'm sure we have never been so happy since she came," said Marian.

"And she got into such a passion this afternoon," added Edith. "Mamma was quite frightened; I heard her say so to papa."

"I said nothing about what she is," replied Ernest. "I said you did not behave well to her; so there I have delivered my protest, and I hope you will attend to it. If you don't, I can only tell you

that I won't walk with you, and you shan't enter my room; and when Madam Sternface comes, I will never beg you a holiday."

Ernest's tone was jesting; but his sisters felt that he was in earnest, and they did not know what to reply; so Edith, ever ready, turned the subject by saying,—

"Please, Ernest, tell us a story."

"Oh, that reminds me," said Ernest, "that I have a story to tell, but you could not understand it, for it is on a Latin theme, 'The Brave are merciful;' what do you think of that, girls? I shan't put you in as examples, depend upon it. However, get me my books, will you? and the other things, and push the table near to the fire, for I have lots of work to do yet."

This was a disappointment to both, but there was some consolation in finding that he thought them still worthy to wait on him; for half the pleasure of having him at home—to Edith, at least—was to be his fag, as he called it. But, when he was established at his lessons, it was very dull for them; and Edith soon said that she would go and help to put Louy to bed. As the door closed on her, Marian yawned, and wished that she had something to do.

"Read," said Ernest, turning over the pages of his dictionary.

"I have read all our books," answered Marian, yawning again.

"Sew," said Ernest, with his pen in his mouth.

"I hate sewing."

"Draw."

"I have lost my pencil."

"Well, then, don't bother me," said Ernest, finally; and Marian sat, looking into the fire, till Edith came back; and soon afterwards, although they had before declared their intention of sitting up until their papa and mamma came home, they gave up the idea by mutual consent, and went to bed.

At the door of their room, nurse met them, and told them to go and undress in the nursery, where Bessy was waiting for them, because Miss Bertram had just fallen off into a doze, and Mr. Parry had ordered her to be kept very quiet. The idea of Mr. Parry having had to be sent for rather shocked them, and, for once, they were quite obedient, and crept silently into their little beds, where they slept too soundly to be disturbed by the gentle step that passed through their room several times during the night.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Mrs. Ellersley returned, she was much grieved to find Helena again feverish and in pain, and although she was herself very tired, she would not leave her until morning; and this was a great comfort to Helena. Before Mrs. Ellersley came home, she had been tossing about, crying, longing for Sarah in the old way, fretting for her papa, and going through all her troubles, until she was ill in mind and body; but the kind tone and the gentle touch worked wonders. The poor girl found the greatest comfort in them, and it was with her hands clasped in

Mrs. Ellersley's that she fell into her first quiet sleep ; and every time that she awoke, she felt happy to know that Mrs. Ellersley was close beside her, and there was grateful affection in the way in which she drew Mrs. Ellersley to her, as the morning dawned, and said, " Thank you, ma'am ; but you must be very tired."

When Mr. Parry paid his early visit, he pronounced her a good deal better ; but said that she would have to keep her bed some days.

" I suspect, madam," he said, turning to Mrs. Ellersley, " that bed is the safest place for her. The young lady must have been venturing too much down stairs."

Helena coloured a little, but said nothing.

" You have not been trying to walk, my dear, have you ?" said Mrs. Ellersley, anxious to clear her, if possible.

" Yes, ma'am," said Helena, bluntly ; " I tried to go for my desk yesterday, but my foot gave way, and I could not walk."

" Of course you could not," said Mr. Parry, looking much annoyed. " It is no use, madam, my endeavouring to cure the young lady, if she disregards my advice entirely."

" She will not do it again, I am sure," said Mrs. Ellersley. " You will be careful, my dear, in future ?"

Helena could not resist the kind, pleading glance, and answered in the affirmative ; and the good surgeon, who felt by no means the same interest in Miss Bertram that he did in every one of the little Ellersleys, took his leave, after recommending Mrs. Ellersley to go to bed.

"I must set you a good example, Helena," she said, with a smile, as soon as the doctor had left the room, "and obey Mr. Parry directly; so good morning, my dear. I will send one of the girls to you," and with a kiss, she too left the room.

No one came for what seemed a long time, and Helena sat listening to the church bells, ringing in the distance, for it was Sunday, until the door opened, and a rosy face, in a pretty blue silk bonnet, peeped in, nodded and smiled, and then disappeared again.

"Oh! Edith, do come in," cried Helena.

"She is awake, Marian; come," said Edith, in the other room, and in their fresh Sunday dress both the girls came in.

"How nice you look," said Helena, with a sigh at the contrast.

"Are you better?" asked Marian.

"Yes," said Helena; "I shall get up to-morrow. I wish I was going to church."

"I wish you were, too," said Edith, warmly. "I know how tired I was with staying at home when I had the measles."

"Shall I bring you some books?" said Marian.

"I don't care, thank you," said Helena, despondingly.

"Ah, but I know what you will care for," said Edith, running away with an air of mystery, and returning in a few minutes in triumph, followed by Bessy, bearing the baby.

"There, now," said Edith, delighted to see Helena's look of pleasure. "That is the nicest thing, isn't it? Nurse says you may have her for half an hour, if you like; and if she cries, you are to ring the bell. And,

Marian, it is quite time, papa says, and he is waiting for us in the garden."

"The dear darling!" said Helena, as soon as she was left alone with her live doll. "You beautiful darling! you love me—don't you? And it was very good of Edith to bring you—such a quiet, good little thing as you are!"

And the little Consie laughed and crowed, and cried "Ba, ba!" all the while, unconscious of the good it was doing in sweetening the too bitter feelings that its young nurse had so often and so fatally indulged.

All that day Helena improved, and in two days she was able to come down stairs, as usual. When she first saw her guardian afterwards, he rather seriously said to her,—

"We must have no more trying to walk, Helena, until Mr. Parry gives you leave. You do not know how serious the consequences might be."

And Helena blushed, and thought that indeed she should not try again, for she had suffered a great deal, and had learnt a little wisdom.

So she condescended to be dependant again on the services of the girls; and, as they were much more ready to be obliging than before, the three weeks that she spent upon the couch were far from being so unhappy as the previous time had been: and when Ernest was at home, she needed nothing. Still, the first time that she was able to put on her things, and join the others in their daily walk, was a great pleasure to her; and to see the three girls together, you might have imagined that a cloud of quarrelling or discontent could scarcely come amongst them.

This harmony was, alas ! soon broken ; but we must go back a little to explain.

We said that Mrs. Ellersley had determined to write to her niece Bertha, in the hope that she could tell her of some one who could help her in the education of her children and her ward. This she did very soon afterwards, and in due time received an answer. But we must premise that Bertha Talbot was the daughter of a gentleman who had lived in the East during the whole of her childhood and youth, which had consequently been spent at an excellent school at Kensington. Her happy holidays had always been passed at Oakridge, with her aunt and uncle Ellersley, and they both looked upon her as a dear and eldest daughter. But when Bertha was old enough to leave school, her father returned to England, and charmed to find his motherless daughter so completely what he would have wished to see her, he immediately took a house in London, where, in the midst of good society, and with the means of improving her mind, Bertha's education was finished according to her father's standard. Bertha herself was, however, scarcely satisfied. She felt that to be the admired and courted object of the world around her was not enough for her. She burned to be of some use, to find something to do. But she knew that, if it was right, the way would be opened before her ; and, meanwhile, she strove to be a comfort to her father, and to avoid being spoilt by the petting and indulgence which it was his pleasure to bestow upon her.

Things were in this state when she received Mrs. Ellersley's letter ; but a change immediately took

place in her prospects, which obliged her to delay her answer for ten days: "An unusual thing for me, dear aunt," she wrote at length, "who am generally such a faithful correspondent, but I hope you will excuse me when you hear the reason." She then explained that her father had during this time received the offer of an appointment which would oblige him to return to the East. The office was so honourable, that he only hesitated to accept it on his daughter's account. Her health had been pronounced not strong enough for India, and, should he go out alone, he would again leave her without a home, "unless, dear aunt, as you have so often promised, you will give me one. Do I not remind you of this promise boldly? You will, perhaps, withdraw it now, particularly when you hear the condition that I wish to add to my coming. I want to come as the children's governess. Do not refuse me. It seems the opening for work and usefulness that I have so long desired. If you think me fit for this work, let me enter upon it. You shall see how heartily I will try to fulfil my duties, so that you shall soon forget your often troublesome niece in the staid preceptress of your daughters."

With many other arguments Bertha Talbot urged her proposal; but welcome as it was in many respects to her aunt and uncle, they hesitated to accept the sacrifice that she was so anxious to make, and they had to be satisfied that her father approved the plan, and on many other points, before the matter was finally settled.

But at last it was arranged; and it was when the children returned from Helena's first walk, that they were told to prepare for their new governess the next

week, and that she was to be their cousin Bertha! Their astonishment was unbounded. The news that Bertha was coming had always been the signal for rejoicing, but now other feelings were mixed up with their joy.

Marian's opinion was, "I am very glad. I shall like her better than anybody to teach us, for she is so accomplished."

"And she is never cross," added Edith, who had clapped her hands with unmixed delight at first. "Still, Marian, Willie minds her more than anybody, except papa; and don't you remember, Marian, last year, about the cherries, you know,"—and Edith blushed a little at the recollection. "You know she was so grieved, and she spoke quite differently to us all that day. I don't think I should like to vex Bertha, Marian."

"Perhaps you might not," said Marian, with a superior air; "but I am decidedly glad that she is coming."

When Marian used long words, and spoke in that way, Edith felt put down, and generally turned to speak to some one else, which she did now:—

"Are you glad, Helena?"

"I don't know," replied Helena, indifferently.

"How can she?" interrupted Marian; "she does not know Bertha; besides, it is quite different with Helena: Bertha will be like any one else to her, you know—she is not her cousin."

"I know that well enough," said Helena to herself, as she went up-stairs, and, instead of taking her things off, sat down in the window-seat to make herself miserable. "I know that I have neither cousins nor

anybody to care about me. Oh, papa!" And, with the old longing grief, Helena sat thinking, and unhappy.

The impression that Miss Talbot's coming would add to her troubles grew upon her as she indulged it, until she really looked upon her as a stern enemy, who would come and take part with Marian against her, and would probably deprive her in a great measure of the society of the only people she cared about; that was, the baby and her dear Mrs. Ellersley, whom she had begun to love with all her heart.

When she saw the preparations that everybody was making for Miss Talbot's coming, she grew worse; and when Captain Ellersley set off on the Monday morning for London, for the purpose of escorting Miss Talbot to Oakridge at the end of the week, Helena's heart sank to zero, and her depression was noticed by all.

It was wet weather, and they were all confined indoors; but Edith and Marian were fully occupied with many little schemes of preparation for their cousin's coming that Helena could not enter into. So Helena was little interrupted; they had no lessons, and she could take her book to her own room often, without being noticed, and brood there over her fancies and the future. It was during these hours that a strange scheme entered her head, and engrossed her mind so entirely, that whether she was alone or with the family, she was thinking about nothing else for several days.

This was a no less wild and singular idea than to go to Sarah—to leave Oakridge, to escape alone, to run away, in fact; and, once having reached Sarah, in

her ignorance of the world, Helena felt no doubt that they should be able to arrange some plan of living together, perhaps near to The Court—at least, until her uncle should return.

No thought of fatigue or difficulty deterred her: once out of the precincts of Oakridge, she feared nothing,—only it must be done before the return of Captain Ellersley and the dreaded Miss Talbot, or the difficulty of accomplishing it would be much increased. In fact, no time was to be lost, and Helena decided that Thursday should be the day on which she would take herself out of the hands of those who had been appointed to take charge of her.

As may be supposed, Wednesday was an anxious day to her; the subject was never out of her mind; and whenever she thought she should not be missed she was making little preparations for her journey. Money she knew would be necessary, so she put her three sovereigns in a purse, and trusted that these would be enough for her expenses until she arrived in London. Afterwards she thought that Sarah would be able to arrange for everything of that sort, and she only intended to take with her a carriage-bag, into which she stuffed a medley of odd treasures: a little miniature of her papa, and a locket, containing his hair and her mother's; then there was an old neck-handkerchief that she had an affection for, and a small copy of the "Lady of the Lake." Besides these things, there was a little ivory box, and her gold thimble, and some other small articles; and, last of all, in a hurried way she pushed in a book of hymns that Mrs. Ellersley had given to her a week or two before. If she had stopped to think a moment as she put that

book in, she, perhaps, might not have taken the step that she knew must bring such anxiety upon one who had been very kind to her.

When the bag was packed, Helena hid it carefully in a drawer, with a fervent hope that neither nurse nor Bessy might have anything to do with her clothes that day, and then she joined the rest down-stairs; but she could not enter into their conversation, for it was all about what they should do when their papa and Bertha came; and Helena blushed whenever any of them appealed to her, for she expected by that time to be far away.

When bed-time came, and she bid Mrs. Ellersley good-night, her courage nearly failed; something rose up in her throat, and she felt inclined to put her arms round Mrs. Ellersley, and say, "I cannot leave you!" but she checked the impulse very soon, and only kissed her with a passionate affection that Mrs. Ellersley well remembered afterwards.

A feverish anxiety kept her awake until very late, but at last she fell into such a heavy slumber that she did not wake completely when Bessy called her, and it was breakfast-time when Edith came to her bedside, and merrily laughed at her for sleeping so long. So she had to dress quickly, and had no time for reflection; nor, indeed, did she wish for it, but rather chose to avoid it; and for that purpose chiefly, after breakfast, she went into the nursery, and played a long time with the children. Never had she been so amiable with them. Percy declared that he liked her to come into the nursery better even than Edith; and every now and then she seized the baby in her arms, and rocked it fondly to and fro. But when she spoke,

it was in a hurried, trembling voice, and her laugh was quite unnatural, and as she took the baby back from her, nurse said, "Miss Bertram, how your hand burns, and you are all in a tremble, now. Does your head ache, my dear?"

"No, no, nurse, I am quite well," answered Helena, hastily; and nurse said no more aloud, but to herself she said, "I shall speak to my mistress about the young lady—with the smallpox so near, we should be careful; for, though Miss Edith has not taken it, the infection may have come into the house; though, in my own mind," she added, as she stirred the fire, "I often think the poor thing frets herself about something; her poor papa, maybe, for that old Sarah said she thought there was nothing like him. However, I will speak to my mistress this very morning."

Meanwhile Helena, for a change, had gone downstairs, and there she found a walk to the village in contemplation, and Mrs. Ellersley told her to get ready to go with them. This was the opportunity Helena had waited for; she certainly intended to go out, but not with them. She could not condescend to say that she was tired, or make any untrue excuse; so she only went to her own room, and said to the girls, in passing,—

"I do not want to go to the village this morning; I wish you would tell your mamma so."

And Edith and Marian, accustomed to her whims, only shrugged their shoulders, and did as she desired.

Mrs. Ellersley was distressed that Helena should not be ready to go out on the first fine morning they had had that week, and was sure that nothing but illness could make her so unwilling to take exercise;

and then nurse gave her opinion, and Mrs. Ellersley determined that she would have Mr. Parry to look at baby's gums, and that he should see Miss Bertram too, and afterwards she told Helena to go to the library, and keep herself warm, and spoke so kindly to her, that she had very nearly given way to her wish to cry, and then betray the whole scheme.

But she did not, and Mrs. Ellersley and the girls went out. Then Helena jumped up, and with hasty, trembling hands took out her cloth jacket, and her black hat, and quickly dressed herself for her expedition. With her carriage-bag in her hand, she listened intently for some minutes, with her door ajar, to be sure that no one was within hearing. To meet Willie on the staircase would have been fatal, and he might burst out of the nursery at any moment. But no sound was heard: so she ran down the staircase, across the hall, through the porch-door—because it was standing open, and through the garden to the gate. This was, again, an important moment, for the gate creaked upon its hinges, and the watch-dog, in the stable-yard, generally barked when he heard this sound, and gave notice to the servants. Her heart beat as she gently moved it so that she could just squeeze through; it closed behind her with a strong, sharp click, and she started, but no one was near; and, when she passed out upon the road, there was nothing to be seen but a string of coal-carts droning in the distance, towards the town.

Helena turned the other way. On Monday she had driven with the other girls, and their papa, to a small station, from which Captain Ellersley went to London, and Helena thought that it would be safer than going

from the town, and that she could easily find the way. She was not afraid of the distance; she had often walked five miles and more with her papa, and once at the station, and on the railway, she should have no more difficulty; for poor Helena, in her ignorance of London, supposed that having her address, she could as easily find Sarah there as if she were in a village.

From the high-road presently she turned into a lane, which the guide-post informed her led to the station which she desired to reach. In this lane she soon met a girl whose face she recognized as belonging to some houses near, and, to her horror, the girl stopped, and, with a curtsy, said, "Oh! if you please, mum, the other young ladies has gone that way," pointing to a cross-footpath that led through some fields to the village.

Helena thought herself discovered; but, calling up all her courage, she only answered, haughtily, "Very well!" and hastily passed the girl. Of course she did not take the footpath, but walked straight forward, as fast as her legs would carry her, and almost oppressed with the excitement of feeling how completely, at last, she was free.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE long, Helena met a waggon, laden with railway goods;—this assured her that she was in the right road for the station; then a man, who said, "A fresh morning, miss;" and, after that, she saw no one

for a long way, until the regular fall of her own steps quite sounded in her ears.

But the lane came to an end, and branched out into two roads, and here came her first perplexity, for she did not know which of them to take, and, although there was a public-house not far off, she durst not go to ask her way. At last, as she went a little distance, first up one road, and then the other, she espied a holly-tree, quite covered with ripe red berries, and it flashed upon her that Edith had looked out of the carriage-window here, and had begun to sing the old story from the "Daisy," of "Master Tommy and his Sister Jane,"—

"Were going up a shady lane ;"—

and, satisfied from this that she was now upon the right road again, she went on with certainty. But, after awhile, she reached some scattered cottages that she did not in the least remember, and, when she had passed these, she came to a village with an old church in it, and a newly-built school, and a turnpike-gate at the entrance that she was sure that she had never seen before, and, in some trepidation, she asked her way of a good-natured looking man, who was leaning idly over the wall of his garden.

"To Coverton, miss?" said he; "you see yon house, with the crooked chimney; turn to the left, and the road lies straight before you. It's a longish walk, though." But Helena had not waited for the last observation, nor had she noticed his stare of curiosity, but with a hasty, "Thank you," she had already resumed her rapid walk.

When she reached the corner of the house with

the crooked chimney, she found, to her pleasure, that the road would lead her quite away from the village : but first she had to pass two cottages ; and from one of these a great dog started out, and barked furiously at her. Helena had never been afraid of dogs, and she had no time for fear now, so, with a loud "Get away," she passed the dog—who, fortunately, was contented with defending his master's very limited property,—and pursued her way.

This led her soon to a very long and steep hill, and it was in climbing this hill that she first became conscious of fatigue ; but she did not heed it ; her only fear was, the danger of pausing for a moment, and she would not even wait to drink from a spring that bubbled up by the side of the road, although she longed for it as much as any wayworn wanderer.

It seemed an endless hill, but at last she reached the summit, and there she found herself at the commencement of a moor, which it seemed that she must traverse, for the road led straight across it. It was a large, bleak, heathery moor, and over it the wind blew piercingly ; the sun had gone in, and a mist hid all the distant country from her sight ; and the moor was quite new to Helena : she was sure, now, that she was in a different road from that she had driven along on Monday ; but the man had certainly said that it led to Coverton, and perhaps, in case of pursuit, it might be fortunate that she had taken a less-frequented route.

So, on the slight dark figure hastened, across the lone moor, with no human being in sight, except a shepherd, far off, who was quite unobserved by Helena. At the other side of the moor she promised herself a

rest, for her ankle had begun to be painful, and for the first time a thrill of fear passed through her. Loneliness she liked ; hunger and fatigue she did not care for, whilst the one object was straight before her ; but if her ankle failed her, what then ? She shrank from the prospect ; the moor seemed longer than before, and she sank down, rather than sat, upon a rugged stone at one side of the road. The sky was one dull grey above, as far as she could see ; the moor spread far around her, unbroken in its dreary sameness, except where, here and there, a stunted, leafless alder grew. In the misty distance was the faint outline of some hills, and even the spire of a church might be nearly traced ; but all was wrapped in mist—a cold, damp mist, with nothing to cheer the traveller.

Helena sat long, scarcely thinking, but unwilling to move, and almost stupefied with fatigue, until she was aroused by a distant, but distinct sound. It was the shriek of a railway-whistle, and at once she started up, reminded of her errand. Her bag had fallen at her feet, but she took it up again, and bravely resumed her walk.

Gradually the moor narrowed at the other side, until it became a wide, but little-frequented lane, where the broad green turf at the sides was broken up here and there, and the black burnt circles showed that it had been occupied by gipsy camps. At present, however, it seemed quite deserted ; but before Helena had, with much pain, walked more than a quarter of a mile farther, she was startled by the appearance of three sleek cows, and behind a girl driving them.

They had apparently come out of a field close by,

for the girl had turned to shut the gate behind them ; and while she was doing this, the cows passed by the end of the short lane, where they should have turned, and came rather quickly towards Helena.

"Howe!" cried their driver, running after them, and waving her arms ; but the cows only went the faster, until the girl, perceiving Helena, called out directly, "Will you turn them, please?"

Helena knew nothing about turning cows, and she would rather have stood aside, and let them pass ; but she pitied the girl's difficulty, and being really good-natured, she held up her arms, too, and cried out, "Shoue! shoue!" as she had seen the country-people do ; and the cows, apparently surprised, turned round at once, and were soon driven in the right direction. Then the girl stopped till Helena came up, to say "Thank you ; if it had not been for you, I should, maybe, have had a long run after them. I am always frightened of their getting out upon the moor."

The girl spoke with a south-country accent, and very pleasantly, and there was a merry smile about her mouth, that made it pleasant to look at her, though she was only dressed in a dark cotton frock, and an old straw bonnet, with a little plaided shawl, crossed in front, and tied behind. Helena smiled a little, in return, and was about to speak, when the girl said, in rather a different tone—for, as Helena came near, she saw that she was not, as she had expected, a girl from the neighbouring village,—

"You walk lame, miss. Are you tired? Perhaps you would come up to the farm, and rest awhile? Aunt would make you welcome."

"No, thank you," replied Helena ; "I am in a

hurry ; but perhaps you can tell me how far it is to Coverton ?”

“ Scarcely a quarter of a mile from here, miss,” replied the girl. “ You’ll see it when you’ve turned that corner.”

“ Is there a train soon, do you know ?” asked Helena, feeling glad, somehow, to exchange a few words with the cheerful country-girl.

“ A train !” echoed the other.

“ Yes ; from the station there,” said Helena.

“ There’s no station about here,” replied the girl. “ Oh, very likely you’ll mean Little Coverton ! but that is above four miles from here. You will not be thinking of going there to-night ?”

Helena could not answer. Four miles yet to walk ! Her heart sank at the idea, for her ankle was very weak and painful. The girl, supposing that she hesitated, continued, in rather a coaxing way,—

“ You had better come home with me. You see the farm just at the top of this little lane. You might know it anywhere, with a pigeon-cote standing up like a tower. You could rest a bit, at any rate.”

“ No, thank you,” said Helena. Much as she shrank from the four miles more, she never thought of stopping until she should reach the station ; and she asked again, “ Can you tell me the way to Little Coverton ?”

“ Let me see,” said the girl, considering a little. “ You don’t go through the village, I know, but you turn to the left, the first turning—no, it’s to the right,—and then it is almost straight all the way. But, miss, you’d better let me call uncle ; he’s only in the farm-yard, and he could tell you all about it.”

"No, thank you," said Helena; "I must go now. Good evening;" and away she walked, leaving the girl looking after her, with some pity, and a good deal of curiosity.

It seemed a long quarter of a mile to Helena, when she came near to the village, and took the turning, as she supposed, that the girl had pointed out to her; but, unfortunately, she had missed the right one, and once more had lost her way. This she only began to find out when she reached a place where the road divided, and where the guide-post pointed in neither direction to such a place as Little Coverton.

She now felt sure that she had lost herself again: the twilight had gathered round her; the mist was thickening on the lower ground; and all her limbs were throbbing with fatigue. For the first time, she began to despair of going on to-night; and when in the distance she thought she could still see the pigeon-cote of the farm-house, a longing seized her to go and rest, at least, awhile, and be near the pleasant girl again.

Scarcely making up her mind what she should do when she arrived at the farm-house, she turned back, and endeavoured to retrace her steps; and having once allowed to herself that she was tired, she seemed to feel it more than before, and by the time she had reached the place where she had parted from the girl, she could hardly drag herself along.

She had almost to feel her way up the little lane, for the mist had increased quickly; but in the distance a bright light gleamed and flickered, and this she thought must shine from the farm-house, so she made her way towards it, until she was stopped by a

wooden gate. She opened this, and, following the cart-road into which it led, she came to an archway in the midst of the out-buildings, through which she entered a large farm-yard.

An old-fashioned door, at one side of the yard, belonged, as it seemed, to the house; so Helena went up to it, and knocked upon it with her knuckles. It was a feeble knocking, but it sufficed to rouse the watch-dog that had been lying in a kennel at some distance, and his deep barking was answered by a shrill yelping from a cur inside. Helena started when she heard the barking; but the great dog was chained, and the little one was silenced speedily, by the voice of one who at the same time unlatched the heavy door. It was the girl herself, and whilst Helena hesitated what to say, the girl exclaimed,—

“Oh, miss, I am glad that you have come back; walk in, please. Aunt, it’s her that helped me with the cows.” She added this as Helena limped over the threshold, and then shut the door behind her.

The aunt she spoke to was a tall, sensible-looking woman, who was standing near the fire, in the act of turning a flat brown cake that had been baking on an iron girdle, such as are still used in country places. She hastily finished turning it, hung the girdle a little higher, and then came forward. The girl had held out her hand rather timidly to Helena, and was leading her into the kitchen.

This was a large room, that extended quite across the house; it had a sanded floor, and rafters for a ceiling. At the far end was the long low window through which Helena had seen the light shining from the wide, old-fashioned fire-place. On the broad

mantle-shelf, above the fire-place, bright candlesticks and irons, a china shepherd and shepherdess, and some other ornaments, were ranged; and under the window a long table was already spread with tea-things and a loaf and cheese.

But Helena did not see all this at first: the light and warmth seemed to blind her, and make her head feel giddy.

"Come in, my dear," said the woman, going forward to meet her; "come up to the fire; it is a cold night, and dark for such as you to be out alone," and she threw an eye of curiosity over the ladylike, and what appeared to her the costly, dress of the young stranger, as she pushed a chair close to the fire, and made her sit down in it.

Helena sank down in the great wooden chair without a word.

"Poor dear!" continued the woman, "she seems quite lame; you must have lost your way, surely! Let me take your hat off. You must have some tea with us, and then, perhaps, my husband can see you home."

Helena was too much exhausted to make any objection even to this alarming proposition, and the good woman proceeded to relieve her of her hat and handkerchief. Then she could see how pale and tired Helena looked; how sunk her eyes were, and her hands as cold as ice; and Mrs. Bray's compassion was completely roused.

"Your hands are starved, and I dare say your feet feel as bad," said the kind woman. "You shall have them in warm water, and then, Janet, you can bring your Sunday shoes down, and we will warm them for

the young lady to put on; and let me take your heavy jacket off, my love; it will make you feel more comfortable."

And, as she suited the action to her words, the woman looked at the fine black dress, and the slender gold chain that held the little watch that had been her father's last gift to Helena, and again she wondered at such a young lady being out alone.

It was no time, however, she thought, for asking questions, till she had followed out all her hospitable suggestions. When Helena had been well warmed, and had Janet's Sunday shoes put on, then she turned to see about the tea.

"When I have taken the cake off, the kettle will boil up in a minute; so, Janet, you had best run and tell your uncle that tea will soon be ready."

"Yes, aunt," said Janet, taking the hint at once, and understanding that her aunt wished to give her the opportunity of explaining to her uncle what her native delicacy told her would not be pleasant before the young lady.

And, by the time the kettle boiled, she came back with the farmer—a tall, stout, fresh-coloured countryman; and he asked no questions, but said, civilly,—

"You've had a long walk, it seems, miss?"

Helena answered, "Yes," with an involuntary blush, for she did not know what puzzling question might not follow; but an impulse of politeness made her rise and offer the great arm-chair in which she had been sitting to the master of the house.

"No, no!" said he, "you need it more than me."

"Sit ye still," said the wife, who managed most matters, in the house, at least; "and, Matthew, come

and get your tea ; and, Janet, move the little stand to beside the young lady—she'll take hers more comfortably then."

And then she bustled about, and made Janet bustle about, till her husband was sitting to his tea at the long table, and Helena had a little round table before her, with a cup of steaming tea upon it, and a hunch of the brown cake that had just been baked.

"And now, would you like a rasher of bacon, or an egg, my dear ? you could have it in a minute—only say," and she pointed first to a side of bacon that hung from one of the great beams, and then to a door, behind which the eggs might be ; but Helena declined both, and at last she, too, sat down, still getting up every now and then to encourage her guest to eat, or to press something else upon her.

"Won't she have some cheese ?" said the farmer, in a low tone, as he helped himself to an enormous slice ; and the offer was transferred to Helena, but she declined that too.

After she had once begun to eat, however, she enjoyed her tea with a zest that pleased her hostess well, and she said with triumph,—

"Ay, I thought you could take it when you tried. There's nothing like trying, as I said to Janet here, when she thought she could not milk a cow. Now, a drop more."

But Helena had already finished two of the large deep cups, and she could take no more, so the good woman was obliged to be content ; and the farmer now had also finished his substantial meal ; so, with a look out of the window, to see if the mist had cleared at

all, he muttered something about foddering up, and left the house.

Then Helena sat still, in a comfortable, dreamy state, watching Janet and her aunt move quickly here and there, clearing milk and bread-and-butter away into the dairy, washing up and setting things in order, until the little terrier lying on the warm hearth near her feet, the tidy form of Janet, and the active movements of her aunt, the sound of the wind outside rattling the old window-panes, the gentle burning of the fire, the flickering light that played upon the wall and rafters, all sights and sounds faded from her eyes and ears, and Helena fell fast asleep.

Then, if she could still have watched, she would have seen that the farmer's wife looked at her compassionately, and said, with a pitying click of her tongue against her mouth,—

“Poor thing! she is quite worn out. I wonder where she's come from! There's something wrong, I warrant. We must keep her, if we can, and Matthew must make inquiries in the morning if anyone knows aught about her.”

“She's pretty, aunt, isn't she?” said Janet, warmly.

“Why, she's fair enough, Janet,” replied her aunt, “and her hands are lily-white, and her dark hair's soft and silken; but d'ye notice, Janet, that proud twitch of her rounded lips? It's an unbroken spirit, I ween. Poor bairn! I wonder what's her history? But sufficient for the present that she was in need of our help. The Good Samaritan didn't wait to say what is he, nor who is he, but he took the stranger, and put

him on his own beast, and that is what we should do too, Janet. It is the Lord's work, if it is set before us; that is all we have to mind. And now, get your knitting out, Janet, and we'll not light the candle, for fear of disturbing her."

So Janet got a stool, and sat down by her aunt's side before the fire, and they both knitted away, and talked in low tones, until the farmer came in and joined them.

And Helena slept on—a deep, heavy sleep. They got their suppers, but that did not wake her; and it was not until nearly nine o'clock that she made the slightest movement. Then it was the little terrier that disturbed her. Some noise outside had startled him, and he gave a loud, sharp bark. The farmer silenced him at once, but Helena was roused. She opened her eyes, and stared wildly round her.

Instead of the little French bed, with its flowery chintz hangings, the bright sunshine peeping in at the window, and Bessy standing with a jug of hot water in her hand, or Edith crying out, "Helena, it is breakfast time!"—she was in a long, strange, half-lighted place, and every object new to her. She rubbed her eyes. It seemed a dream. But the farmer's wife said,—

"I am afraid, miss, that Nip has woke you up suddenly."

And then it all came into her head, and she gave a deep sigh, and leaned back again.

But she did not shut her eyes, and the farmer's wife, seeing that she remained awake, bade Janet fetch a candle and the books, for it was bedtime for

all, she said. And Janet lighted the single dip candle in a bright brass stick, and put it on the round table before her uncle, and then she brought the Bible and a smaller book from the broad window-sill, where they had been lying, and when she had set them, too, on the table, she sat down again, and folded her hands before her.

The good farmer took out of a leather case a huge pair of spectacles, wiped them carefully with a red cotton handkerchief, and put them on. Then he opened the Bible, and read with reverence the second evening lesson. Helena listened with surprise, and when they afterwards knelt in prayer, she shyly joined them.

When prayers were over, Janet moved the books and table, got another candle, received her aunt and uncle's blessings, and then turning to Helena, said,—

“Now, miss, will you go up to bed with me?”

“It is only a rough place,” said the farmer's wife; “but if you will share it with her, you are quite welcome, and I hope you'll get a good night's rest.”

“Thank you,” said Helena; and then, with a manner that had much more of sweetness in it than she often showed, she held out her hand, to bid “good-night.”

“God bless you, my child,” said the farmer's wife, taking it kindly; “you'll let me kiss you, the same as Janet, as your own mother is not here to-night.”

“I have no mother,” burst from Helena's lips, and the tears started to her eyes.

“Poor thing!” said the farmer's wife; “but you have friends. Are you going to them, my dear?”

You shouldn't have left them, to travel by yourself in this way."

Helena felt as if she should have liked to have told the motherly woman all her injuries, but she had some idea that she should not meet with her entire sympathy, so she stopped, and only said,—

"I am going to my friend Sarah, in London."

"To London by yourself, my dear?" exclaimed the farmer's wife, in amazement. "But who is Sarah, then?"

"She was my papa's housekeeper, and I am going to live with her," said Helena.

"And does your papa know, my dear?"

"My papa's dead," said Helena; and, tired as she was, she could not refrain from bursting into an agony of tears.

The good woman put her arm round Helena, and drew her near, and tried to comfort her, whilst Janet stood by and cried, from sympathy.

When Helena was a little soothed, Mrs. Bray said,—

"Now come to bed, my dear; you are sadly tired, and rest will do you the most good; and to-morrow, if all be well, you shall tell us what you mean to do."

Then, preceded by Janet, carrying the candle, they went up a crooked wooden staircase into a long, low room over the kitchen, and the same size. It seemed a store-place as well as a bed-room,—for many things were piled up at one end, and there was a strong and unpleasant smell of cheese through the room.

But the low bed at one end was large and clean,

and the furniture, though poor and scanty, was all kept in good order.

"Now, my dear young lady," said the good woman, before she went down stairs and left the two girls together, "you will not find this place such as you have been used to, but I hope you will sleep soundly, and get rested."

At first the girls were rather shy, but soon Janet's sociable humour got the better of her timidity; and, while she waited upon the young lady, and paid her every attention she could think of, she talked away to her with a heartiness that Helena, who was now wide-awake, could not resist.

"Isn't this a nice large room?" began Janet, complacently; "and it's never cold, on account of being right over the kitchen. Perhaps, though, you do not like the smell of the cheese," she added, finding that Helena did not agree very warmly with her: "now, I never feel it—I suppose, because I'm used to it; for, when I first came here, I know I couldn't bear some of these strong smells."

"Have you not always lived here?" asked Helena, with indifference.

"Oh, no!" replied Janet, with a momentary look of sadness; "I have only been here two years this harvest. I'm a London-born; you wouldn't think it, would you, now?"

"You know London, then?" said Helena, with sudden interest.

"I should do," answered Janet. "I was eleven years old when mother died, and that was only three months after father and little Joe."

"Are they both dead?" said Helena, with pity in her tone.

"Yes," replied Janet; "and that was what made me so sorry for you, miss—if you will not mind my saying so—for I have not forgotten what it is. Joe died of a bad fever; that was what shook mother first—the nursing him—and she was so cut up about it; then there was the accident, and she didn't live long after that."

Janet's eyes filled with tears, and Helena looked at her with sympathy.

"She was aunt's only sister, and all the relations she had, and what made her so happy when she died—next to going to Heaven, I mean—was that aunt and uncle would take care of me, she knew; and they are always so good to me; I hope, when I am a woman, I shall be a help to them. Aunt says I am now; but I mean when she gets past working; then I shall do everything, and she shall be a lady, as I tell her."

"Do you like being here?" said Helena, who felt rather sick with the cheesy smell.

"Oh, yes," said Janet, cheerfully. "It is my home now, you know. At first, when I came, I didn't like it, because I used to think of mother, and wish for her back again; and, when I had to get up before daylight in winter, and go out on the cold mornings, and serve the pigs and the calves, and to work, till I was ready to drop, at making bands in the harvest-fields, or anything like that; or when uncle used to get sharp with me, then I would sometimes cry a bit to myself. You know it was all so different from my other home, miss," Janet added, in an apologizing tone.

"London must be different, I should think," said Helena.

"Oh yes, miss!" said Janet; "and then I was fond of reading and such-like, and in London you can't walk along a street but you see pictures and beautiful things; and we lived in our parlour, and I never had much to do, but to go to school, and I used to be dressed up—as poor mother liked to see me—all in silks and muslins, to walk in the park of an evening, with mother and my father when he came from his work—he was a clerk,—and when we came in again, father used to put his arms round me, and call me his own Janet. I can remember it as well as if it was yesterday, and mother putting me to bed, and kissing me, and it all seemed very different when I came here. I didn't know my aunt rightly, and when things seemed rough, I used to think of old times, and I could feel something come up in my throat, and I used to throw my arms out of bed, and cry. It was very wrong of me; but, after a bit, aunt found it out, and she talked to me, and she told me that I should be content with the station God had placed me in; and, by degrees, I got over it, and I tried to be good, and to help my aunt and uncle, and I don't think they ever look back on the time when I was such a trouble to them, moping about, as I did at first. But I shall tire you talking this way, miss. Aunt says I am a great talker, when I get set on."

"No," said Helena; "you don't tire me." However, Janet did not say much more, and Helena lay thinking how differently this new companion talked from anyone she had heard before. Janet had lost her

father and her mother and her home. She had come to a place where she had to go out and in, and work hard, and she had to sleep amongst cheeses, and yet she was always merry, and seemed only to think of how she could be useful. It was very strange, and, thinking how strange it was, Helena fell asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

It seemed as if Helena had been in bed but a short time when, the next morning, she was roused by a rough voice calling out,—

“ Arn’t you up yet, Janet ? ”

“ Yes, uncle, in a minute ! ” cried a sleepy voice by her side, and Janet jumped up, ran to the window to see what sort of a morning it was, and then proceeded to perform her toilet.

She moved about very carefully, that she might not waken the young lady, and Helena, though quite awake, did not speak, and Janet said her prayers, and went down without knowing that she had disturbed her.

Then Helena got up, and she, too, went to the window, and in the gray morning light, looked out at the dreary prospect. The mist was still there, hiding all distant objects ; but near at hand, the tiles of the out-buildings, the leafless hedges, and the grass in the field before the house were all covered with heavy dew. It could not be more than half-past six, she

thought; but she was too anxious to go to bed again, tired as she still felt, so she began to dress herself as well as the dim light and the scanty accommodation would allow her.

She missed Bessy to brush and plait her hair—indeed, her arms ached before she had got it put up in any fashion, and there was no looking-glass to see if it was straight; however, she managed to dress herself at last, and then she went down stairs.

By that time it was much lighter, and when she entered the kitchen, Mrs. Bray, the farmer's wife, was upon her knees before the fire, trying to blow some life into the half-green sticks. She was too much occupied to see the young lady at first; but when she did perceive her, she got up, and said,—

“Well, my dear, are you rested? Sit ye down here, then, till I have got the fire made, and the breakfast ready.”

The kitchen was half full of smoke, and everything looked cold and miserable, and Helena shivered.

“You see, Janet's out in the farm-yard, serving the calves,” continued Mrs. Bray; “and then she has to milk, and after that she'll have to get the butter and eggs ready for the market, so that I must make the fire myself, and it's not so easy to me since I have had the lumbago in my back.”

The fire still would not burn, so Mrs. Bray went to a cupboard and brought out a long piece of sheet-iron, which she fixed before the chimney, and thus increasing the draught of air into the fireplace, the sticks at last began to flame out, and the fire in time burned up. Then the good woman set herself to sweep

the kitchen, and put things in order, whilst Helena, still half asleep, watched her operations with some curiosity.

She also went backwards and forwards, in and out of the dairy, and other places; and Janet came in two or three times, with her hands blue and mottled with the cold, but a merry smile making her face look warm. Then Mrs. Bray washed her hands, and put on a clean apron, and began to make the breakfast ready. This did not take her long, and when her preparations were finished, she came up to Helena, who still sat by the fireside, and, putting her hand upon her shoulder, said,—

“Now, my dear, that I have time to speak to you, I should like to hear about your own matters. Cannot you tell me something more about yourself? I am a plain woman, and you, I can see, are born a lady; but I have had experience, and I could help a young thing like you, if you would only let me see how I am to do so.”

Helena blushed, but did not speak; and seeing this, Mrs. Bray continued,—

“Are you sure that you are doing what is right?—what you think your father would have liked? Is there no one who should be with you now?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Helena, proudly. “You have no right——” and there she stopped.

“No, honey,” said Mrs. Bray, rather sadly, “I have no right, that is true; only, whether it be gentle or simple, I can’t see a young person running into trouble without trying to help her out of it. I

think, and Matthew thinks too, that you must have other friends that you might be with; and oh! my dear, think what you're about, before you cast off your lawful friends. Can't you go back to them now?"

Helena gave almost a shudder, and cried out, "No, no; I must go to Sarah. I am going to the station this morning."

At this moment, Janet and her uncle entered the kitchen, and Mrs. Bray, turning to her husband, said,—

"The young lady thinks she must go off by train this morning, Matthew; so, instead of going to Coverton, hadn't she better just drive to market with us, and we can set her off from D——?"

Matthew agreed with his wife, as he generally did, and they proceeded to have prayers, and then breakfast, without more talk about the matter. But whilst they were at breakfast, there was something said about London, and where Helena was going to, and it came out that Sarah lived in the same street that Janet's father had lived in; and Matthew said that he would go to some relations of the people who had succeeded him in the house, who lived in the market-town, and arrange for some one meeting Helena in London; or, if not, why, he would go with her himself. This he privately arranged with his wife, and then he brought the market-cart to the door; and Janet piled her baskets of butter, and eggs, and poultry, up behind, with a seat for Helena in the midst of them; and then the farmer and his wife got up in front, and with a cheerful nod to Janet, who had really shed

a few tears at parting from the young lady, thinking she might never see her again, they drove away.

The farmer's horse was a good one of its kind, but it was not like the fleet carriage-horses that Helena had generally been driven with, and as they jogged on at a steady pace she had plenty of time to think. Over and over again did Mrs. Bray's words come into her head, and she was compelled to ask herself the questions—"Is it right to leave your lawful friends? Are you doing what your father would have liked?"

Happy is it for the girl to whom conscience thus speaks, when she listens to the holy voice, and tries in earnest to follow its dictates.

Helena knew quite well that it was by her father's wish that she had been placed with Captain Ellersley, and Sarah had gone away from her; and now that she once acknowledged this truth, the distorted veil through which she had seen other things seemed to be falling from her eyes. She compared herself with Janet.

Janet in that rough farm-house, remembering her mother's fondness, and the superior comforts of her childish days, and yet happy, and anxious only to show gratitude and be useful; hard worked, left alone, as she was to-day, in that dreary place, and yet cheerful, and never thinking of repining; whilst she, also an orphan, had been taken by friends who had watched over and cared for her; and as she contrasted her own lot with Janet's, she could not but acknowledge to herself that Mrs. Ellersley had been very kind to her. And then there was Ernest, and the baby—ah! that dear baby! should she never see it again?—and Edith!

Janet would have called Edith a nice young lady, she felt sure; and her guardian—she scarcely liked to think of him, it made her feel uncomfortable; but she could not help remembering how he used to call her one of his girls, and make her always equal with them. And in contrast to that cheesy chamber, rose up her pretty room, and the sweet garden, and the stream, and the Bathurst woods; and then she thought of Marian, even, with more of kindly feeling, as she remembered the lovely picture at the Hall, and Marian staying with her, when she sprained her ankle. No; Helena did not allow it yet; but she was not sure that she was doing what was right.

A kind inquiry how she was getting on, or whether she was cold or not, were the only things to break her train of thought, until they drew near the market-town, when the road began to be thronged with people, all going in the same direction. Here a woman, mounted on a strong cart-horse, that jogged her up and down at every step, was taking her butter to market, in a heavy basket that she held upon her arm. There a common cart, so full of mothers and children, and chickens and ducks, that it was wonderful how they all got packed into it, and how they ever would be got out again. Then a richer farmer drove past in his gig, his loaded corn-cart following at a respectful distance; and droves of sheep and cattle, and various people walking, made up a curious assemblage.

Most of them had a greeting for the farmer and his wife. "A fresh morning, Mr. Bray!" "That's not Janet, surely?" "Well, missus, you never come

our way, I think!"—a reproachful salutation from a hospitable neighbour—were among the numerous recognitions they received.

- "How amused Edith would be," crossed Helena's mind, when the remembrance that she should probably not see Edith any more checked the thought, and made her sorrowful. "Cannot you turn back again, honey, if you are not in the right path?" came into her head again; but it was only to be rejected once more. "Turn back now! impossible!" and as she said this to herself, they crossed a bridge, passed through a turnpike at the other side, and were in the town of D——.

It was the largest town that Helena had seen, and she was astonished at the bustle in the market-place, which was full of booths, and carts, and market people; and noisy with men crying their different wares, and organs and ballad-singers, and the tread of busy feet.

But out of all this fuss they speedily turned into the large yard of the principal inn of the place, where Matthew Bray always put up his cart and horse, because he knew the landlord; and here they dismounted and unpacked the cart.

Helena was benumbed with cold, and Mrs. Bray, seeing this, said, "You shall come with me into the bar-parlour, and get well warmed. I know that Mrs. Robinson will be glad to see us; and Matthew, if you want to be going to the corn-market, don't mind us. I can carry the baskets well enough, and you can come back again when you are ready, to see about the young lady."

Matthew took her at her word, and went off directly to the corn-market, whilst his wife led Helena through the back-door into the hotel. There were other people going in at the same time, and Mrs. Bray kept close to Helena, that she might not be pushed about.

The bar-parlour opened out of the main passage of the house, and at the opposite side was the door of a private sitting-room, and they had to make way a little for a tall, handsome young lady, who was passing into this room as Mrs. Bray and her charge came up. The young lady was followed by a military-looking man, who stopped to say to a servant behind him, "Let the carriage be ready at twelve precisely."

At the first sound of his commanding voice, Helena started so violently that Mrs. Bray perceived it, and seeing also that she would have turned away, seized her arm, to prevent her doing so. At the same moment the gentleman looked up in an indifferent manner, as he was proceeding into the room, when suddenly his eye fell upon our heroine, and, in an accent of surprise, he exclaimed, "Helena, are you here?"

Fain would Helena have rushed from the place, but her good friend was watching her. She pushed her forward, whilst, in a hasty whisper, she said, earnestly, "Go back into the right path, honey;" and Helena was obliged to submit to the recognition.

"Why, child, how is this?" said the captain. "Are you all here? Have you come to meet us? Here, Bertha!"

But Helena did not reply, and her guardian, all at

once, was struck with her unusual appearance, her pale, anxious face, the lines deeper than ever beneath her eyes, her lips trembling with emotion, and he saw that something was amiss. He looked next at Mrs. Bray—her face, he knew, as belonging to a woman he had often seen in D——; but there was evidently some mystery in the matter, and not wishing for an explanation in the passage, he led the way into the sitting-room, where Miss Talbot, supposing that her uncle had been detained by some one he knew, was quietly looking out of the window.

When she heard her uncle's step, she turned round to make some trifling observation to him, and was much surprised to see him leading by the hand a graceful young girl, in deep mourning, whose appearance showed that she was in great trouble, followed by a homely but respectable-looking woman, in a chintz gown, a plaided shawl, and a black silk bonnet, who appeared to be watching the other two with some curiosity.

"How is this, Helena?" said Captain Ellersley, after Mrs. Bray had closed the door. "Is not your aunt, I mean Mrs. Ellersley, with you, or any of the children? Who is this person? Speak, child. What has happened?"

Helena seemed to try to answer him, but she could not.

Captain Ellersley turned to Mrs. Bray.

"Well, sir," said that good woman, "I will tell you all I know. This young lady came to our house last night at darkening; its the Hill Farm, sir. Matthew Bray, my husband's name is,—you'll have

seen it in the voting-papers, sir; and my niece, that's Janet Cummin—quite a young girl she is—had seen her walking along the road to Coverton, and very tired and lame she seemed to be, poor thing, so Janet said; and she wanted her to come and rest herself at our house, but she said she must be going to the station. However, I suppose she'd been fairly worn out, poor young lady, for, when she came to our door, she was fit to drop, and so she stayed with us all night, and we made quite free with her, sir, seeing that she was alone, and seemingly in trouble, to our opinion. And Matthew and me brought her in this morning, thinking we might hear something about her in the market; and, if not, why Matthew would have gone with her—he had made his mind up to it—for to London she must go, it appeared; and I'm sure if she's anything to you, sir, I'm glad we've met with you, for she was very lone when Janet first saw her, poor thing." And having thus finished her lengthy explanation, Mrs. Bray looked compassionately at the trembling girl.

"I cannot understand this," said Captain Ellersley, in a stern voice. "Give me some further explanation, Helena. What has happened at home?"

"Nothing," replied Helena, faintly. She was not pale now, but crimson with shame, and held her head down as she said in a low voice that tried to be defiant, "I wanted to go to Sarah, in London."

"Sarah! who is Sarah?" cried Captain Ellersley, losing all patience.

Miss Talbot, who had now begun to comprehend

what was going on, at this moment came forward, and stood near to her uncle.

"This is my ward, Bertha," he said, bitterly, as he turned to her. "A pretty introduction for you. I left her at home with the others, all right; giving trouble enough, though, it is true; but here I find her wandering about the lanes like a beggar. What am I to think? It is disgraceful. Give me some explanation, child, this instant!"

But Helena was now frightened; for Captain Ellersley had worked himself up into a high state of indignation, and Miss Talbot, seeing this, laid her hand upon his arm, and said,—

"Perhaps, dear uncle, she would tell you more alone."

And the captain, who was naturally a very courteous man, was recalled to himself; and he turned to the farmer's wife, and said,—

"Mrs. Bray; perhaps you will leave us. I am extremely obliged to you and your husband for your disinterested kindness to Miss Bertram. At present I scarcely understand how it is that my ward has placed herself in such a position, but I thank you for your hospitality to her."

Mrs. Bray immediately curtsied, and was about to withdraw, when Captain Ellersley added,—

"But I must see you again. Where shall you be?"

"In the market, sir; but perhaps you would let me call here again, sir. I should be glad to hear that all was pleasantly settled for the young lady."

"I will come to you in the market," said Captain

Ellersley. "And may I request you to say nothing about this unfortunate affair. Miss Bertram has only been with us for a short time ; but Mrs. Ellersley, I know, will feel it much."

"You may depend upon us, sir," said Mrs. Bray, whilst Helena sighed at this allusion to Mrs. Ellersley's distress. "I'll speak to Matthew as I go to market. Good morning, sir ; good-bye, miss. Janet will be pleased to hear that you are safe with your lawful friends."

A faint smile was all the answer she received from Helena ; and the good woman left the room.

"Now, Helena, come," said Captain Ellersley, in a half-coaxing tone, laying his hand upon her shoulder, "what is all this nonsense about ?"

Helena seemed about to speak, then she hesitated, and the moment was lost, for a clock struck, and Captain Ellersley immediately said,—

"It is time for the meeting, and I shall probably have to take the chair. Bertha, my dear, I am sorry to leave you under these circumstances ; but will you take care of her till I come back ? Have you anything to tell me before I go, Helena ?"

Once more she hesitated, and, far too much annoyed and impatient to wait another instant, Captain Ellersley seized his hat and left the room.

CHAPTER X.

THERE WAS an awkward silence for a few minutes after Helena and Miss Talbot were left alone together. Helena remained standing, with her hand resting upon the table, in an immovable attitude; and Miss Talbot hesitated what to say, for the young girl was a perfect stranger. But a word of commonplace politeness came to her assistance, and she said kindly—

‘You look cold; will you not come and sit beside the fire.’

Helena turned round at her voice, and with a low “Thank you,” moved slowly to the chair at one side of the fire-place that Miss Talbot had pointed out to her.

“You had better take your hat off. It may be more than an hour before Captain Ellersley comes back to us.”

Helena did so, and Miss Talbot also divested herself of her gloves, and shawl, and bonnet; and then, taking a piece of embroidery out of her carriage-bag, she sat down at the opposite side of the hearth-rug, and began to work away as quietly as if she had been at home. She looked very pleasing as she sat, and Helena, despite her former prejudices, could not help thinking so. She was rather above the middle height; her figure was good and commanding; and there was a decision about her whole air which might have been

unfeminine, had it not been for the softness of her voice and the winning smile that sometimes played about her mouth. She was, as Edith had said, beautiful; and it was true that she might be both admired and loved.

For many minutes Helena sat watching her with earnestness, her thoughts busy all the time. At last Miss Talbot raised her dark eyes with a look of some amusement, and said,—

“Well, do you think you shall like me?”

“I do not know,” replied Helena readily, though she blushed deeply at the same time.

“A very proper answer,” said Miss Talbot; “for it is impossible that you can judge yet. I suppose you know that I am coming to Oakridge to take care of you all?”

Helena said, “Yes,” though, had she not made up her mind some time ago that Miss Talbot should never take charge of her?

“I am afraid that it is going to be a heavy charge,” continued Miss Talbot, who had resumed her stitching; “at least, if you are not to be trusted any more than this. Mind, I do not know the circumstances; but, from what I can guess, I am inclined to be very angry with you, to begin with. So is my uncle; that you must see. You have run away, have you not?”

Helena felt very uncomfortable, but she could not deny the charge.

“That is what apprentices do, when they have been badly treated by their masters; and they can be sent to prison for it. I do not know whether the law extends to young girls running away from their

guardians; but there is always some allowance to be made for harshness or ill-treatment. Has Mrs. Ellersley been starving you? or has nurse been scolding you more than any of the others? Perhaps Marian has pinched your feelings, or thoughtless little Edith has been scratching at your pet fancies? What! you will not complain of them? Well, that is forbearing of you."

Miss Talbot spoke with severity, and Helena felt indignant; but at the same time she could not help seeing, with increasing shame, the ludicrous light that was thrown over the troubles she had felt so heavy. She did not, however, speak, and there was silence for some time, broken by Miss Talbot's saying, in quite a different tone,—

"When I was a young girl like you, I was allowed to spend all my holidays at Oakridge, and they used to be amongst the happiest periods of my life. My dear aunt used to welcome me always with the same kind smile, and to the children my arrival was a sort of jubilee. I can fancy now that I am going home for the holidays, and I am full of impatience to arrive. It seems to me that no one could be unhappy in my aunt Ellen's house; and yet, if you have willingly left that home, you must have been unhappy. Is it so changed since I was there?"

"No!" cried Helena; "but you were their cousin,—it was quite different. I didn't belong to them,—they didn't want me. Edith and Marian had their own affairs to talk about, and I was only in the way; and Marian hated me—I know she did,—from the first moment she saw me. And my own papa is dead,

and I have nobody in the world to love me, except Sarah—she was our housekeeper,—and she left me too, but she would not have gone if she had known how miserable I should be; and when I heard that you were coming to be our governess, and I knew that you would be one of them too, and that you would just think me in the way too, I could not bear it any longer, and I thought that I would go without their knowing—run away, as you call it,—and I would go to Sarah, and make her take care of me, until my uncle comes home from Italy. And what is the use of stopping me? They would not really care,—they would be glad after awhile.”

With the greatest rapidity, Helena poured out this confession, as if relieving her mind of a great burden; but now her voice was choked with sobs, and the passionate tears flowed down her cheeks.

“My poor child!” said Miss Talbot, going near to her, and kindly putting her arm round her, “you have, indeed, been very unhappy;” and, caressing her, she waited till the torrent of tears had passed away. “With such a torment of bad spirits in your mind, you were, indeed, to be much pitied. No one to love you! Thinking yourself a burden! Fearing my arrival as an addition to your enemies! Poor Helena! what a host of troubles you had raised up for yourself!”

Helena rather started from the arm that she had begun to lean upon, when she heard herself accused of raising up her own troubles; but Miss Talbot, sitting down beside her, quietly continued,—

“Listen to me, whilst I tell you the different way

in which they have spoken of you from what you have imagined. When my uncle came to London for me last Monday, I asked, very naturally, how he had left all at home. He replied, 'All flourishing;' and added, 'your little godchild, Constance, is almost as big as Louisa, and, of course, is by far the finest child that has ever been seen in our nursery; and she has got another play-fellow to pet and spoil her. I suppose that Ellen has told you about the new member of our family? she is my ward, and we mean to bring her up with our girls as long as her uncle will leave her with us.' I was curious about you, and Captain Ellersley told me further, that you seemed a fine girl, tall for your age, and like your father—so like, he added, 'that my heart warmed towards her at once. She has not taken much to our girls yet, they tell me; but she pets the baby famously, so I hope that she will get accustomed to the rest of us by-and-by.' From that I did not guess that my uncle thought you a burden."

Helena was listening eagerly, but she did not reply. Miss Talbot continued,—

"Now I will read to you a part of the first letter I received from my aunt after you came. Listen. My aunt writes,—'Our young ward arrived last week: she is an interesting girl, and seems to have good abilities. I hope that she will prove a nice companion for Marian and Edith. As yet they have not made much progress towards intimacy; but this can scarcely be wondered at. Poor Helena has suffered much from the loss of the only relative she knew; and her coming here has, besides, separated her from an

affectionate old servant, who brought her to Oakridge. In time, however, I hope that her young spirits will rise again, and that she will be happy amongst us. You will believe, dear Bertha, that it is my wish and prayer, that I may be able to fulfil my duty to the young orphan who has been so unexpectedly thrown upon our care.' "

Here Miss Talbot stopped, and folded up the letter; and Helena bent her head down lower than before.

"Now, my dear girl," said Miss Talbot, "you may judge whether the feelings of Captain and Mrs. Ellersley towards you have been exactly what you supposed. You must consider that it was no small stretch of kindness in a lady already so burdened with the cares of a large family, to receive amongst them one whom she knew would be a heavy addition to her responsibility. They might have sent you at once to school, or they might have altogether declined the care of you; then you would have probably been turned over to the hands of strangers, who could not be expected to have the interest in you that your father's old friends would have. You see this now, do you not?"

"Yes," said Helena; "I did not think of that before."

"And now let us turn to the other side. You are quite old enough to understand that you had also a duty to perform. If you remembered this you would try to make yourself so much at home amongst them that they would forget you were a stranger; you would try to become an elder sister to the girls; you would meet

little Edith's warm-heartedness with friendly kindness, and you would interest yourself in Marian's pursuits ; and, as you were the eldest, you would try to be a good example to them in every way. There is no better cure for unhappiness than trying to do good ; but I do not need the assurance that you are too much ashamed to give me—to feel convinced that this has not been the remedy you have tried. If you had thought of this, you would not have rebelled against your father's last wishes."

"I have not done so," interrupted Helena, much hurt.

"Nay ; did he not make Captain Ellersley your guardian ?" said Bertha ; "your duty was in consequence transferred to him, and your father would have been deeply grieved had he known how soon you would scorn the authority he had set over you, and throw off all control."

This Helena's conscience told her was but too true, and she said nothing in reply.

"You may think that I am speaking harshly to you, but it is not so. Your mind has become warped with brooding upon your real and fancied troubles, and I want to set it straight again, by showing you matters as they really are. And you must not think I do not feel for you—that I have not a deep interest in you. You should know that it was your dear father's great regret, as he expressed it to Captain Ellersley, that your education had been so much neglected, and that you had not been placed earlier under some lady's care ; and it is since hearing of this regret that I have been glad that you were to be one

of my pupils at Oakridge. And I want you to exercise your own good sense, that you may help, not hinder me. I am supposing that you know that you are bound, as every Christian is, to resist evil with all your strength; that you have learnt your duty with your lips, and that you desire to fulfil it in your life. If so, we shall get on well together. It is because you have been only thinking of yourself, and not of what you have to be to others, that you have been so unhappy lately; but that time is over, you will begin anew. You will go back with us this morning in a different spirit; and, by God's help, you will be better and happier than you have ever been before. You will not disappoint me, Helena, will you?"

"I thought I would rather die than go back again," said Helena, impetuously; "but——"

"But you do not think so now," said Bertha, kindly.

"I think I could go with you," said Helena, "only it will be so strange. The girls—Marian will be so unpleasant. I should not venture to look at Ernest; and the servants, too. No; I cannot go back again to-day."

"I do not expect that your return will be very pleasant. You have no right to expect that it should be so. No one can break the laws of social intercourse, as you have done, without bearing the penalty; and I think you must allow that you deserve at least to be uncomfortable; but I was not speaking of the question of your going back, that does not rest with you. The decision is entirely in the hands of

your guardian ; and, if he allows you to return to his family, you should be grateful to him, and not complain of any disagreeables attending your return. You must see this, Helena, do you not ? ”

“ Yes,” said Helena, “ I will go.”

This was said in a very low tone, but Bertha smiled to see how Helena still thought it was a sort of concession on her part if she went back.

“ But,” said she, “ amongst those you expect to see again at Oakridge, you never mentioned my aunt. Are you uncertain how she will receive you ? ”

“ No,” said Helena, eagerly, the tears starting to her eyes ; “ but I was thinking how kind she was to me the night I was so ill.”

“ And how ungrateful you had been to her,” said Miss Talbot, gravely. “ Indeed, it is so ; she must feel deeply wounded ; but you must try to obtain her forgiveness, and show her that you are anxious to do better. Have you never wondered how we happened to be here this morning ? ”

“ I scarcely thought about it,” said Helena ; “ but how was it ? Have you not been at ho—” home yet, she was going to say, but she changed it into “ Oakridge yet ? ”

Miss Talbot smiled at the change of words. She saw that Oakridge had been a home to Helena, although she would not allow it, and she answered, “ No. We were to have reached Oakridge this evening ; but Captain Ellersley, rather unexpectedly, was called to attend a meeting in this town, so we travelled all night that we might be here in time, and we have ordered a carriage at twelve o’clock, to take

us home. It is not far from that hour now," she added, looking at her watch, "Captain Ellersley will soon be here."

Helena sighed, and Miss Talbot resumed her work for a few minutes, when they were both rather startled by suddenly hearing Captain Ellersley's voice in the passage. Helena half rose from her chair nervously.

"My dear child," said Miss Talbot, laying her hand upon her arm, "you need not be afraid of my uncle. You must allow that he has great reason to be displeased with you; but be patient, and show him that you are sorry."

She had no time to say more, for Captain Ellersley entered the room.

"Bertha," he said, "Mrs. Cheveleigh is in the town. Her husband told me so just now, and I thought that you would like to see her."

"Oh, thank you, uncle!" cried Miss Talbot, her eyes sparkling with pleasure; "but where is she?"

"At Smith's, the wool-shop," answered Captain Ellersley. "And she is still so far from strong that she intends to wait there until Cheveleigh is ready to return. She has the boy with her, little Walter. I told Cheveleigh you would go to her at Smith's."

Bertha made an eager step forward, then remembered Helena, and hesitated; "I can see Dora afterwards, though; it is not as if many miles were to divide us," she added, with a smile.

"Oh, you had better go to her now," said Captain Ellersley, "if you think you can find the way alone. I have some papers to look over, and I will stay here till you come back."

"Very well, uncle," replied Bertha. "I shall not be more than ten minutes, I dare say; but it is so delightful to have this unexpected peep at Dora and her boy."

Captain Ellersley held the door open for his niece, received her smiling nod of farewell, and then sat down at one end of the table, and, unrolling some papers that he held in his hand, was speedily engrossed in them, and did not take the slightest notice of his companion.

She, poor girl, had quite understood the little scruples that Miss Talbot and Captain Ellersley had had about leaving her alone; and she felt humiliated at their want of confidence in her, but not so indignant as she would have been before her conversation with Miss Talbot. She was also painfully conscious of her guardian's silence. Captain Ellersley had always had a kind, cheerful word for her, if he met her accidentally, or she was left alone with him at Oakridge, and she felt the difference.

Yet, with inconsistency, much as she felt the silence burdensome, she dreaded his speaking still more. The examination of the papers did not last long; they were finished, and put away in a small leather bag. Then Captain Ellersley got up, stirred the fire, walked to the window, whistled a bar or two of an air,—in short, seemed thoroughly uncomfortable.

"He is going to speak," thought Helena, with a quake, as he turned round again. But, no; it was only to give another poke to the harmless fire, which was already burning as brightly as it could; and then

he sat down in the chair opposite to Helena, who hardly knew where to hold her face.

"I wish I had not gone away," thought she—the first time that she had, in so many words, even to herself, acknowledged that she had done wrong. "They will never like me again. Oh! how I wish"—but she was startled from her wishing by Captain Ellersley jumping up again, and walking to the window, where there certainly was not a fine prospect, as it only looked out into the inn-yard, upon a number of dirty carts and gigs, and an ostler or two busy with their work.

Much as Helena wished for Miss Talbot's return, Captain Ellersley did not seem to have wished it less; for when, after about a quarter of an hour's absence, which had seemed four times as much, she made her appearance, he greeted her with alacrity, and rang for the carriage at once.

Before many words had passed between Miss Talbot and her uncle, chiefly about the unlooked-for meeting with her old school-friend, the fly was ready. There was a little bustle of gathering up bags and parcels, then Captain Ellersley offered his arm to Bertha, and for the first time looked at Helena.

"Come, my dear," said Miss Talbot, holding out her hand; and Helena, feeling extremely like a prisoner, went along with them, and, with cold politeness, was handed into the carriage by her guardian.

The drive to Oakridge was not a long one, and the time passed quickly to Helena, for her thoughts were busy. Her companions talked, but she did not listen; she was trying to believe that she was actually going

back to Oakridge again, and she was thinking of what might meet her there, and of all the new ideas she had heard from Miss Talbot this morning.

The first disturbance to her reverie was when they stopped at a turnpike-gate, and, looking out, she saw that they were passing through the scattered village where she had first asked her way, and, singularly enough, leaning over the turnstile beside the gate, in the same listless manner, was the very man whose directions she had followed. In a minute her face was covered with blushes, and she shrank back, not thinking how unlikely it was that the man should recognize in the young lady travelling in a post-carriage the tired girl that he had seen wandering alone the day before.

But after they had passed this village, Helena looked out with much interest, recalling, as she passed each object, the events of yesterday, which seemed, indeed, a month ago. And soon she saw, with beating heart, that they were coming very near to the end of their short journey, and a few tears of agitation coursed down her cheeks. Although she was not aware of it, the conversation between her companions had ceased, and Miss Talbot had been watching her for some minutes. Her kind heart had been feeling much for Helena, and, as if she could not resist the opportunity, she now said,—

“Helena is very unhappy, uncle. She is sorry, I know, for having given you so much trouble. Will you not forgive her?”

Captain Ellersley's manner changed at once, and he said, stiffly, looking only at Bertha,—

"It is your aunt who will have had the most trouble, and it is from her that Helena must first obtain forgiveness."

The tone was so hopeless and so cold, that Helena felt chilled to the heart, her tears stopped, and the pale face had all its old constrained expression by the time they reached the well-known iron gate—that gate which she had turned so cautiously only yesterday. It now flew wide open, and they seemed to drive only too rapidly up to the door, which was closed, for no one expected their arrival then. But it was not for long; in a moment Edith was out upon the step, and Marian not far behind.

"It is papa and Bertha!" cried Edith's delighted voice; "and there is Helena. Mamma! mamma!" she almost shrieked, "here is Helena!" and she ran back into the house to spread the news.

Willie, Percy, and their little sister, had escaped from the nursery at the first sound, and they were now clapping their hands, and echoing Edith's joyful cry. But in the background stood Mrs. Ellersley, pale and agitated. She came forward to meet them; and her husband, seeing that she could hardly stand, put her arm in his, and led—almost carried her into the library, where Bertha, escaping from the rapturous greetings of the children, followed them.

Then Edith and Marian flew to Helena, and whilst Edith put her arm round her, Marian relieved her of her bag; and they both poured forth questions and information.

"Oh, Helena! where have you been? Mamma has been so ill. We telegraphed for papa, and James

has been all over ——. Mamma thought you had fallen into the river; but nurse said ——”

“Hush, Edie! you know you were not to repeat what nurse said. But did you go to meet them, Helena? How was it? Don't you like Bertha? Isn't she beautiful? Let us come into the library. How tired you look, Helena.”

And this was the return she had dreaded. How much she had wronged them! But Mrs. Ellersley!—she had been ill. Helena yielded to the hand that led her to the library door; but she durst not enter.

“She won't come in, mamma,” said Edith; and Mrs. Ellersley's voice called her directly. Then she hesitated no longer; but without thinking of her guardian, who was sitting at her feet, or Bertha, who was standing near, Helena only saw the smile that encouraged her, and, yielding to the fulness of her heart, she rushed up to the couch, and threw her arms round Mrs. Ellersley, who held her there some moments.

And Helena had said that she had not a friend! Captain Ellersley, however, who did not quite understand or make allowance for the caprice that could give such pain one day and show such affection on the next, made a sign to his niece; and she said at once,—

“Now, Helena, come up stairs, and take off your things. Mrs. Ellersley is not well enough to bear much at present. When she is a little better, you will have more to say to her, I dare say.”

And Helena, feeling that, in spite of everything, she had returned to a welcome home, followed Miss Talbot up stairs.

CHAPTER XI.

UP stairs everything seemed strangely familiar to her. As she passed near the nursery, there was the old sound—"Behave yourself, Master Willie; aren't you ashamed of yourself?"—and she would fain have gone in and taken possession of the baby, as usual; but she durst not face Mrs. Nurse, of all people; and, besides, Miss Talbot was acting as a sort of constable, and went with her to her own little room, and only left her there with the request that she would stay until she came to fetch her.

And once alone in her own little room, it did, indeed, seem a dream. She only wished that it were one, and that she could wake and find it gone; for although Mrs. Ellersley was so kind to her, she felt almost certain that her guardian would never forgive her. He had looked so very stern in the library; and no wonder, Helena thought, when she had made Mrs. Ellersley so ill.

That was what she felt the most. During the evening, Captain Ellersley took no notice whatever of her; the servants, she felt, looked curiously at her; the children's thoughtless remarks several times called a deep blush to her cheek, and made their father speak angrily to them; but more than all, she was grieved to see how completely shaken Mrs. Ellersley seemed to be, as she lay on the sofa, almost without

speaking, and depended entirely upon her niece for everything.

And Bertha was at home directly. It seemed as if, before she came, there must have always been an empty place, which she now filled immediately. Without her, things would scarcely have gone smoothly that evening. But she was so kind and thoughtful. She checked Edith's thoughtlessness; she enlivened Marian; and found occupation for both. She soothed her uncle, and spared Mrs. Ellersley the least necessity for exertion; and, above all, she at once took charge of Helena, who felt, with some annoyance, that she was by no means at liberty to move about exactly as she pleased.

Bessy did not come to help her when she went to bed, but Miss Talbot stayed with her for some time, and only left her with a strict injunction to the girls in the next room by no means to disturb her.

The next morning it was worse. The excitement of the night before had passed away, and nothing but the unpleasantness remained. Mrs. Ellersley had had a bad night, and could not come down to breakfast; and this did not make Captain Ellersley more talkative, or the rest more cheerful.

Neither he nor Bertha addressed Helena, and she, of course, dared not speak a word. Gradually it had dawned upon Edith and Marian that Helena was in disgrace, and they regarded her with a sort of sympathizing curiosity. It was a relief when breakfast was over. Bertha left the room, saying that she must see her aunt, and the girls were following her, when Captain Ellersley, in a voice unusually stern, said,—

"Wait; I want to speak to you."

Both Helena and Marian stopped at the door; but he said, "It is Helena that I want; you may go." And Marian departed, feeling a good deal of pity for Helena, for she had never seen her father look as he did now, except once, long ago, when he thought Ernest had told a lie.

As for Helena herself, she trembled; but seeing that there was no avoiding the interview, she came back again, and stood before her guardian, who was on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire.

"My niece Bertha tells me," he began, "that you are sorry for the trouble that you have given us; but how am I to be sure of that? You may do the same again, or, perhaps, even worse; and I cannot allow my wife to have the annoyance of such conduct, nor my house the disgrace of it. You must go to school; and I hope that you will there learn to estimate the advantages of the home that you have given up."

Helena turned very pale; the idea of going to school had always been a horrible one to her, brought up alone, as she had been; and she felt that Oakridge was already sufficiently precious to her. Perhaps her wretched aspect rather softened Captain Ellersley, for he added,—

"I am sorry to be obliged to act towards you in a manner that I never contemplated. We always meant to make you like one of our own children, as long as you remained with us. But since we cannot manage you, it would not be doing you justice to keep you here. I shall, therefore, take pains to find some school where the discipline is firm, and yet

where you may be well treated, until Sir John Bertram comes to join me in the care of you."

Helena listened with an aching heart. She had been wishing to tell her guardian that she was sorry, but it might have seemed like trying to bribe him to let her stay; now, however, that he spoke so decidedly, she might perhaps tell him without suspicion, and as he still remained silent, apparently expecting her to go away, she said, hurriedly,—

"It is not because I am to go to school—but Miss Talbot was right. I know that I have done wrong, and I am very sorry. I shall never be happy again; but I wish that you and Mrs. Ellersley would forgive me."

The effort was great, and her guardian appreciated it, and said, in a changed voice,—

"Mrs. Ellersley is indeed too kind to you, Helena; you will not have much difficulty in obtaining her forgiveness; only you must remember that she has been deeply wounded, and it is only from her extreme kindness towards you that she forgives so easily. As for myself, if you really feel that you have been wrong, and are sorry, I forgive you too; and I hope that whilst you remain with us, we may have no further reason to be displeased with you. I ought perhaps to require your word that you will not try to leave us again. Can I trust you?"

"Indeed," said Helena, with a quivering lip; "you need not be afraid! I would never leave you all my life if I could help it." And an involuntary sob showed how deeply she felt her words.

"Well, my child," said Captain Ellersley, with

something of his old manner, taking her hand, "I will trust you. Your poor father was my dearest friend. When we were in the army together we were like brothers. He was the soul of honour. I should not like to distrust his child. You will not be so foolish again! You will not disappoint our confidence! I will trust you. Now I must leave you. Whilst you remain with us, you will be, like my girls, under Miss Talbot's charge, and it is my desire that you should be guided by her entirely. She will be a good friend to you, I know. You may tell her what I have said, and that now you are at liberty to join the others, or do what you like. I am going over to Cheveleigh, after I have seen my wife; and I shall not be back till evening. You can tell Ernest to come and meet me." And, after speaking thus kindly to her, Captain Ellersley shook hands again, and then left his ward to relieve her various feelings by a flood of tears.

Meanwhile Bertha was occupied up stairs, and Edith and Marian were together in the library, pitying Helena, and all anxiety, when, in the midst of their gossiping, in came Ernest, earlier than usual, and delightfully ignorant of all that had occurred. Both his sisters ran to meet him; and both, in a torrent of words, attempted to make him understand the wonderful events of the last few days.

"What now, girls? Gently. One at a time! Hold your tongue, Edie, and let me hear Marian first!" were some of his vain attempts to procure a rational explanation; but it was of no use, and at last his curiosity was so great that he let them tell him in the usual way, Edith pouring out the history,

and Marian contradicting every now and then, and putting in notes and additions. By this means he learned that Bertha had come; that she was not a bit altered, except that she was more beautiful than ever; that mamma was ill, so that she had not been able to come down to breakfast; and that it was all because Helena had gone away by herself the day before yesterday; they didn't know how, or where she had gone to, and Bertha had not let them ask about it; and that she had come back with papa and Bertha; and that papa had been talking to her in the dining-room ever since breakfast; and that he looked so strange they were quite frightened; they thought he must be very angry with poor Helena.

So far had they got, when Bertha came into the room; and warm greetings were exchanged between the cousins. Then Ernest anxiously applied to her to know how his mother was; "for," said he, "these girls talk so fast, that it is not easy to make anything out. They say mamma has been ill."

"She has been rather overcome with anxiety during your papa's absence," said Bertha; "but she is much better this morning, and I dare say that she will come down to dinner. She is dressing now."

"But it was all about Helena, was it not, Bertha?" said Edith.

"Well, girls," said Ernest, before his cousin could reply, I can only say that, if what you say about Helena Bertram's going away be true, it is you that have driven her to it. And since you tell of her so eagerly, I will tell of you. Bertha shall be the judge. Would you believe it, Bertha, from the time that

poor girl came, they have done nothing but bully her—that is to say, if they were not quarrelling between themselves, they made sides against her. No wonder if she was miserable.”

“Is this true?” said Bertha, with a sorrowful look, turning to the girls.

“No, Bertha,” said Marian, beginning to cry a little; whilst Edith for once had nothing to say, but looked hot and red. “No, Bertha; but that is always the way that Ernest has been going on.”

“Now Bertha, listen,” continued Ernest; “was this fair? Suppose Helena had a book they wanted to read; one of them would say to the other, ‘Have you seen so-and-so?’ and pretend to be looking for it, although they knew where it was well enough.”

“Unladylike, Marian; I am ashamed of you!” burst from Miss Talbot’s lips, whilst Ernest continued—

“Then Helena would put down the book, curl up her lip scornfully, and walk out of the room; but she had not shut the door before they would burst out laughing, and imitate her.”

“It was only once, Ernest,” cried Edith, in rather a piteous tone; “and she knew that Marian was reading it.”

“Another time,” said Ernest, without seeming to listen to her—“another time they were all walking in the garden, when nurse brought baby out. They ran to her, and she held out her hands to Helena; so, of course, Marian was mad with jealousy, and she cried out, ‘You have no right to take her; she is our sister.’ Such babies themselves! I am ashamed to tell you these things, Bertha; and I was ashamed of my

sisters. Fancy their mimicing her proud way of saying, 'I don't choose;' or, 'That is mine;' and if mamma made her first in any way, could you believe it, Marian was vexed. I don't wonder she went away," and as Ernest said this in the most indignant manner, he turned round angrily, and walked away to the window.

Bertha had sat down beside the table, and was leaning her head upon her hand, but she did not speak.

"She has come back now, Ernest," said Edith, still in a pleading tone; "and we will never be unkind to her again, will we, Marian? I never used to mean, but I forgot."

"Where is she now, then?" said Ernest, turning quickly round.

"She is in the dining-room with papa," said Edith. "She is not to speak to us, scarcely; and Bertha has been always with her till now."

"Shame!" cried Ernest, indignantly.

"No, Ernest," said Bertha, raising her head at last. "You must remember that your papa has reason to be angry with her. She has shown a strangely wilful spirit; and she has acted towards your mamma in a way that must have displeased him greatly. She is, besides, in some things thoughtful beyond her age, and she ought to have known better. However much she may have suffered from my cousins' treatment of her"—and Bertha spoke very sorrowfully,—“she has shown her great need of a submissive spirit, and she must be taught it. From what I hear now, I cannot but think that your father's decision is a just one;

and that since she cannot be made happy here, she had better go to school."

"To school!" echoed both the girls. "Oh! Bertha!" whilst Ernest muttered something that sounded like a respectful smothering of his former exclamation.

"Then where is she now?" continued he, impatiently: "left all alone, I suppose, as usual."

"No; papa is with her," replied Edith.

"That he is not," said Ernest; "he has gone to shoot at Cheveleigh. The servants told me as I came in."

"She is alone, then," said Bertha. "I will bring her here; but now, pray, Ernest, do not say anything that may encourage her to rebel against your papa's decision. As for you, Edith and Marian, I will ask you to be kind to her during the very short time that she may have to remain near you."

"Oh! Bertha, I am sure we never meant——" they began; but Bertha had already gone, and they were left to the tender mercies of their indignant brother.

When Bertha went into the dining-room, Helena was not there; and, in some anxiety, she proceeded to seek her up stairs. To her great relief, Helena was only in her own room, sitting in her favourite position, with her elbow resting on the window-sill. She started up at the first sound of Miss Talbot's entrance.

"I thought you were in the dining-room all this time," said Bertha, "with Captain Ellersley."

"No; he has gone to Cheveleigh. I came here because he said that I might go where I liked," answered Helena, with rather a defiant air.

"What do you mean, my dear?" said Bertha, a little anxious, from Helena's way of expressing herself, as to the result of the interview between her angry uncle and his wilful ward.

"I was to tell you so," said Helena. "It is all right," she added, with a half-smile. "You need not be frightened. Do you care so much for what I do? You seemed to be afraid that I had been doing something wrong again."

"You shall ask me that again, when you know me better," answered Bertha.

"Perhaps I shall never do that," said Helena; "I am going to school. Captain Ellersley thinks I must want to go, when I left Oakridge of my own accord. That is natural, is it not? And he thinks that as I cannot be managed here, I had better go to some one who can control me better. That is sensible, is it not? So I shall perhaps soon be gone."

"It is not natural, my dear child, to hear you talking in this way about it," said Bertha, kindly; "but it is a disagreeable subject. Do not let us dwell upon it to-day. We have other things to do."

"Let me tell you something that is not disagreeable, then!" said Helena. "I begged my guardian to forgive me, and he has done so; and he says, too, that Mrs. Ellersley will be only too ready to do the same."

"That is good news, indeed!" said Bertha, smiling; "and I may tell you, Helena, that when my uncle once says he will forgive, he will also soon forget; you have only to show him that you are sincere."

"And I am to tell you also," continued Helena, speaking still in the same constrained and almost

bitter way, "that I may join the others, and do what I like; so I suppose I may stay here. I will go down, though, if you say I must."

"I will not say you must, my dear," said Bertha. "Do not fancy that I shall be less indulgent than your guardian, to-day, at least. But do you know that Ernest has come, and he wishes to see you."

"Oh! does he know?" cried Helena. "I cannot see him?"

"He knows:" said Bertha; "but you need not be afraid of meeting him. He has just been speaking most kindly of you."

"Ernest always has been kind," said Helena; "but what will he think of me?"

"As I said before, my dear," replied Bertha, "the consequences of your conduct will be grievous to you in many ways; but the bearing these things patiently will show that you are really sorry. It seems as if I were always lecturing you; but I am your governess."

"I wish I were never to have any other," said Helena, bluntly. "I will do anything you tell me. I want to be told. I hate myself."

"There are many things that I could tell you," said Miss Talbot, gravely. "If you like, I will sit down beside you, and tell you some things now. I will tell you that you are a Christian, a member of Christ; and, however you may hate the sin that cleaves to you, you must not hate yourself, for whom Christ died. You have been called to be one of a pure and holy people, of whom your Saviour is the Head. He looks tenderly upon you, grieving for your sin. He calls upon you to take up your cross—the trials that lie

before you from youth to age,—and bids you bear them in His name. His grace will help you; His strength will hold you, for you are His. But you must throw off your sins. Leave your selfishness, lay down your pride. Live not unto yourself, but unto Him that bought you with a dreadful price; and let every day see you striving to become more pleasing in His sight.”

“I am not His,” cried Helena, speaking passionately. “You do not know how different I am from what you are speaking of. Sometimes when I was at church I used to wish that I was like the other people,—they seemed to be praying all together,—and I did not feel as if I belonged to them, except when I wanted some things very much, and when my papa was ill; but I often wished that I could be different.”

“You did belong to them,” said Miss Talbot, deeply shocked at poor Helena’s loneliness. “That is one of the blessings of going to church, that you can feel that you are making one of a large family, a great household gathered together in one name, the children of God, telling Him all their wants, praising Him for all their blessings, listening to the teaching of His word. Like one voice, this worship rises up to heaven, where it is offered by the Lord. Dear Helena, you must have felt like a ship without a rudder, when the storms of trouble came around you; and like the tendrils of a creeping plant, when the stem they clung to has been ruthlessly cut down. No wonder that you were unhappy. But you need be so no longer; you have but to realize the truths that I have repeated to you, and then to enter upon the work that

is before you. It is the work of a lifetime, but it is a glorious work. Will you not begin with it at once?"

"I will," said Helena; and her heart bounded as she spoke. It seemed as if she had found what she had been long looking for. She seized it eagerly, and at that moment there was no great act of self-denial, no extraordinary burden of endurance, that she would not have taken up with almost gladness. Well would it be for her if the spirit was enduring, and would sustain her against the Lilliputian enemies that attack the Christian soldier every day.

CHAPTER XII.

It was with a fervent wish that such might be the case with Helena, that Miss Talbot, after kissing her affectionately, said,—

"I must go now, my dear. When you like, come to us in the library,"—and left the room.

She had scarcely been gone five minutes, when Bessy came to say, "Please, Miss Bertram, my mistress will be glad to see you in her dressing-room," and with a lighter step than had been hers for many a month, she sprang up directly to obey the summons.

She was crossing the top of the staircase, when she was startled by a voice calling out, from the hall

below,—“Halloo, Helena, is that you?” and she was obliged to go half-way down to meet Ernest, who shook hands warmly with her. But she was covered with blushes and confusion, and, though glad to have the meeting with Ernest over, she made it as short as possible, by stammering out, “Your mamma wants me,—I must go,” and ran up stairs again in a minute.

Mrs. Ellersley was lying on the sofa in her dressing-room, with little Louisa, happily playing with her doll, coiled up at one end of it. She held out her hand when Helena came in, and bade her “good morning,” with a kiss.

“I sent for you my dear,” she said, “because I scarcely saw you yesterday, and, besides, I wanted you to hold this scarlet wool for me.”

“Oh yes, ma’am,” said Helena, taking the skein of wool. “You are very kind to me, and I am very, very sorry for having grieved you. Will you forgive me?”

“My dear child,” said Mrs. Ellersley, gently kissing her again, “do not say any more about it. I am sure you intend to be a good girl now. Captain Ellersley thinks so too. I was truly glad to hear him; for he was very angry with you, my dear, and it certainly was wrong of you, and I am afraid we had not made you happy, when you could think of leaving us in that way.”

“Oh no, ma’am!” cried Helena, “it was very wicked of me; but I know now how much I loved you, and I hope that I shall never trouble you again.”

“Well, well, my dear,” replied Mrs. Ellersley,

"you must try to be more gentle. I think you are a little too violent sometimes; yet you must believe that I love you dearly, and now that Bertha has come, I dare say that we shall go on very nicely. How do you think that you shall like my dear niece?"

Helena's answer was quite warm enough to satisfy Mrs. Ellersley, and they soon fell into a quiet talk about buying wools and winter shopping, and the baby, until Helena felt quite comfortable. But, in the midst, they were interrupted by the rather roisy entrance of Mr. Ernest, who saluted his mother quickly, and then began, in playful anger, to reproach them,—

"Now, really, mamma and Helena, this is too bad—keeping me down stairs with the idea that you were not visible, and here I find you holding a solemn conclave."

"Holding red wool you mean, Ernest," said Helena; and, as this was the nearest approach to witticism that Helena had ever made in the house, Ernest laughed so loud, that Louy laughed too, and, drawing Ernest's attention towards her, he seized her in his arms, and began such a series of whimsical gambols with her, that Helena laughed until she could not hold the wool steady, and Mrs. Ellersley declared that she would turn them all out of the room. Then Ernest remembered the errand that he had come up stairs for, and said,—

"Mamma will you let Helena off? We want to walk to the Red Point this morning. Jennings tells me that there are still a few nuts left upon the

bushes there, and I have coaxed Bertha to leave her unpacking and go with us. You will come, won't you, Helena?"

"Yes, thank you," said Helena, "unless you would let me stay with you," she added, turning to Mrs. Ellersley; "I should like it just as well."

"No, my dear," answered Mrs. Ellersley, "the walk will do you good, and I had rather be quiet until dinner-time. Only ask Bertha to send me my knitting-needles, and the book of patterns, that I left on one of the tables in the drawing-room, I think."

"I know—I saw them," said Helena; and the last round of wool being wound off her hands, she was flying away, when she nearly ran against Bertha, who was just entering the room.

She had come to arrange for her aunt's comfort, and to ask if she would not like one of the girls to stay with her; but Mrs. Ellersley gave the same answer that she had done to Helena, and she added, "I have been telling Helena so just now. She wanted to stay with me. I am quite glad, Bertha, to see how much happier she looks this morning. You have no idea how silent and miserable she is sometimes."

"Poor girl," said Bertha. "Her mind is relieved by the kind way in which you have all received her back again. I have been endeavouring this morning to drive away some of her morbid fancies, and I am quite pleased to see how much more cheerful she is. We cannot expect that she will be able all at once to keep up this more rational frame of mind; but she

is a dear, loveable girl, and I hope, in time, to see her both good and happy."

Ernest here made an observation in a low, grumbling tone, which sounded like, "If the girls only let her alone;" but his cousin took no notice of it; for she did not wish her aunt to be annoyed by hearing of her daughter's unkind conduct to the stranger.

She had, however, taken the opportunity of Ernest's being up stairs to speak very seriously to Edith and Marian themselves about it. They scarcely needed to be convinced that they had behaved in an ill-bred and most unkind manner; they acknowledged it, and said that they would apologize to Helena; but they were much depressed when Bertha told them that it would be some time before she could regard them as she had done before.

They did not, however, forget their voluntary promise, and, for once, Marian was spokeswoman; and, when Helena came down, prepared for her walk, she said, in her most pleasant way,—

"Helena, we are very sorry that we did not try to make you happier, but will you be friends with us now?"

And Helena was so touched by Marian's unexpected apology, that she spoke in return more freely than she had ever done before, and, when Bertha came down stairs, the trio were conversing in the greatest harmony.

It was rather a relief to Helena to find that their walk was to lie in quite a different direction from the one that she had trod so painfully two days before.

They turned away from the high road almost immediately, and Ernest led them by the most unfrequented route, through a very wild part of the country, up some steep hills, until they reached a high moorland, from which Helena fancied that she could trace some of the points of her weary journey.

After walking briskly against the mountain breeze for some distance, they came to the edge of the rocky cliff, from which they overlooked a most romantic glen. The ground sloped suddenly from the ridge upon which they stood, and rose as steeply at the other side, forming a deep and narrow valley, at the bottom of which the river flowed rather rapidly over a rocky bed. The sides of the valley were thickly wooded with trees, now almost leafless ; the yews alone were green ; and the prospect might have been dreary, but for the bright blue sky, against which the dark gray cliffs stood out so sharply, and but for the life that running water always gives to a scene.

"Now," said Ernest, "who will go with me? You see that long flat piece of green, half-way down the wood? That is where the hazel-bushes grow ; we can reach it easily ; come along."

"I rather doubt the easiness," said Miss Talbot ; "however, let us try ;" and, following Ernest's lead, they made their way bravely through the underwood, until they reached a scarcely-trodden path that led them to the cleared place that Ernest had pointed out to them.

Here the cliffs rose to a great height above their heads, bare and rugged, except where, from the crevices, a mountain-ash or alder grew, or a creeping

plant threw its now withering tendrils over the brown surface of the rock. Some brilliant clusters of bright red berries on one of these small trees attracted the attention of the girls, and they begged of Ernest to try and pluck them some; but he was too much interested in the pursuit of his own game to attend to them, and from a little distance he soon summoned them in a voice of great delight, for he had found one bush, standing almost alone, which was really covered with clusters of beautiful, ripe, brown nuts, whilst the ground beneath was strewed with them.

"Ah! Bertha," said Ernest, when they had reached the place, "you laughed at my great bag; but do you not think now that I shall fill it well?"

They might have laughed at him before, but now they helped him with right good will; and the bag was soon quite filled, and their pockets too, and yet there were nuts upon the tree that Ernest was very unwilling not to take. But Bertha's watch declared that they had no more time; and the difficulty of carrying any more home in part reconciled the ardent nut-hunter to the necessity of leaving some behind.

"I have plenty, however," he said, by way of comforting himself, "for both home and school. Papa must have some; he is fond of nuts, I know; and I shall present a few to Mr. Barnard; the rest will be relished by our fellows on Monday night, as we sit round my study fire. But you were saying something about berries. There are some glorious bunches; catch them Edith."

In a minute he had climbed up an uneven rock,

and raised himself so that he could reach the branches that were the most loaded with the scarlet fruit, and after breaking off four of the finest—one for each, that there might be no quarrelling—he swung himself down again, and they prepared to retrace their steps.

It was a famous scramble up the wood again, and without the aid of Ernest to hold back the boughs, and to lend a helping hand, they could scarcely have managed it. But they did reach the top at last, and once upon the level moorland again, where they could go on smoothly, Ernest amused them greatly by pulling out of his pocket a pair of nut-crackers, with which he proceeded to crack some of the finest for his companions, and politely handed them at the same time a pill-box full of salt.

They all laughed heartily, whilst they enjoyed the nuts, and Edith teased him for having so counted his chickens before they were hatched.

Ernest began to defend himself, and maintained that he had received such authentic information about the existence of the nuts as justified him in making every preparation for the gathering of them; and, furthermore, that even if he had not been certain that he should find some, still it was prudent to be ready in case he did.

“Like the Scotch before the battle of Culloden, when they had their pipers ready to celebrate the victory that they never gained,” said Marian.

“An old wife’s story,” said Ernest, rather contemptuously, “like most of the facts in your histories; but if they had won, how vexed they would have been if the Pæan of victory could not have been sounded. Is

it not better, Bertha, to be prepared for either good luck or bad ? ”

“ In one sense it is,” replied his cousin. “ We should be prepared, by good habits and fixed principles, for whatever may befall us ; but remember, Ernest, that what you call good or bad luck is generally only another name for the result of thoughtlessness or of the reverse. A lucky person is usually one who has striven carefully for the object he had in view, and has made the most of his opportunities.”

“ At that rate, then, Bertha,” said Ernest, “ a person who tries hard will always get what he wants.”

“ It is generally the case,” said Bertha ; “ and it is a great encouragement to labour hard in whatever you have been called to do, that it is so ordered. The principal thing to mind is, that the object we strive for should be lawful and well-pleasing in the sight of God ; then we may always hope that our labour will be blessed, and our object gained, though it may not be always exactly in the way in which we had expected.”

“ But if it is a bad object, Bertha ? Napoleon, for instance—he wished for power, and he strove for it from his youth ; he did all kinds of wicked things to compass it, yet he got what he wanted.”

“ You are not the first, my dear Ernest,” answered Bertha, “ who has marvelled at such things as these. You know King David, many thousand years ago, said, ‘ I have seen the wicked flourish like a green bay-tree.’ He looked again, and it was gone. The wonderful success of Napoleon—the way in which his

majestic intellect was allowed to serve him, until he had raised himself above the nations—may encourage us to work, to improve our time and talents ; but the sight of Buonaparte at St. Helena, upon the barren, rocky island, suffering, dying, a prisoner, alone, this may warn us that we must not work for ourselves entirely,—that it is in a higher service that our talents must be used, else the fame that we have reached, or the riches that we have heaped up, may crumble in our hands like this piece of rotten wood, and leave nought but useless dust behind.”

“ Well,” said Ernest, “ at any rate, boys at school haven’t much to do with such things. They work hard to get the prize, or to please their father, or because they would get thrashed if they didn’t,—not that I believe getting thrashed ever made a boy get a prize, if he hadn’t it in him without,—but I mean, they don’t think about improving their talents, or—that kind of thing, you know, Bertha.”

“ Yet Napoleon, when he was but a boy at school,” said his cousin, “ began the course he meant to run. You remember the snow-ball fights and the mimic battles. And the Christian school-boy should begin as soon. It is a nobler course than Napoleon’s that he has to run, and a higher prize that he may look for. He has to spread holiness and to do good, and every action of his daily life may send him further on that course, and nearer to that prize. The idle whim denied, the angry answer crushed, the earnest working at what he is told to do, the turning away from evil in every shape, because he is a Christian,—

these are the means by which the school-boy trains himself for his work, and prepares himself for the great battle of life."

"I would not have killed Murat, if I had been Napoleon," said Edith, who had been wearied with the long, serious conversation, and had been walking apart for some time, but had now come back to deliver this observation.

They all laughed.

"You Napoleon!" cried Ernest; "a pretty emperor you would make! Come, here is another nut, easier to crack than the one we have had in our hands so long."

Edith protested that she had not seen a nut since just after they left the wood, and Ernest proceeded to explain to her the difference between a hazel-nut and a metaphysical nut. Edith stared and listened, and finally laughed, and by that time they had reached their own gate, and the deep bell of the Bathurst clock was striking their dinner-hour.

Mrs. Ellersley, when she saw the nuts, thought they had done wonders to be at home in such good time; and, to their great joy, she dined with them, and gladly listened to their adventures.

In the afternoon Ernest called upon his sisters and Helena to go with him to the village to make certain purchases that were necessary to the success of some experiments that he intended to try out of his new book of chemistry; but Helena was tired, her ankle was weak, and it was decreed that she should lie still in the library, and be quiet until evening. Helena thought herself quite able, at least, to stroll in the

garden with Mrs. Ellersley, but Bertha said "Decidedly not," and Helena never attempted to resist, but was grateful for the "Amy Herbert" that Miss Talbot brought her from her book-shelves.

In due time the party came back from the village, with little brown-paper parcels, and bottles of dangerous liquids. Ernest was full of grumbling; he had not been able to get half the things he wanted, and it was a great chance that he could show anything at all to-night: however, he retired with what he had into his own little room, and admitted only Edith, as his assistant.

Willie, of course, was not allowed to go in; but he was in a high state of excitement, and rushed often into the library with reports of what Ernest was doing, information gleaned by standing on tiptoe in the middle of a bed of winter spinach in the kitchen garden, and thus peeping in at Ernest's window.

It was with some difficulty that they were all assembled for tea, and then Bertha had positively to refuse to make any for the young gentleman and Edith, unless they would first perform some sort of toilet; for in their new-born scientific ardour they had made their appearance with rough heads, and hands much the worse for acids and various kinds of dirt.

As soon as tea was over, Ernest disappeared alone, and Edith waited with fidgety impatience for the summons to the performance. This was brought at last by Willie, who rushed in to say that all was ready. He did not exactly know what was ready; but that did not diminish his pleasure in the announce-

ment. "Come, mamma, and all of you, and see," he cried; and Ernest followed more quietly, and modestly said that there was nothing worth their looking at, he was afraid, for he had been able to get so few materials; but he was just going to try a little experiment or two in the hall.

So of course they all felt obliged to go, and waited in the hall whilst Ernest was making his final arrangements; and Willie, with great glee, was obeying Ernest's command to put out the lights, by mounting on the banister and blowing out the lamp, and then shutting the library door, so as to leave them in total darkness.

Then began the little experiments, many of which will no doubt be familiar to those of our young readers who have been pleased to watch the wonders that may be done by joining different chemical substances together, or by using instruments for separating the different matters with which other substances are formed. There was the producing sparks from brown paper, successful every time, and showing well in the complete darkness; and a very pretty exhibition of a beautiful column of flame, springing up in a moment from a wine-glass containing acid. There was another experiment, but it did not go off so well; and they were watching the progress of it anxiously, when the click of the hall door was heard, and silly Edith, thinking of some stories of burglars that she had been listening to in the nursery, and forgetting that thieves do not generally walk in at the house-door, in the middle of the evening, screamed out, "Oh! here are robbers! O dear!" and clung

to her next neighbour, who happened to be Helena and, for an instant, the panic spread amongst them, and Master Willie, who was not celebrated for bravery, hid himself in his mamma's gown and trembled.

But their fears were soon dispelled, when the familiar voice of Captain Ellersley exclaimed,—

“What is all this? Has anything happened? What is the matter?”

No wonder that he had been a little alarmed by hearing a scream as he entered, and by finding all his family gathered in the hall, without a light, and where a very peculiar kind of odour prevailed. But they laughed now, and the matter was soon explained.

“It was only Edith, papa; she is so silly,” said the hero Willie; but he was not attended to.

Ernest was anxious to tell his papa how successful he had been in his experiments, and a light was called for.

Willie immediately ran for the library lamp, but was fortunately stopped in time by Bertha, who gave him a candle in its place; and they all went to have a peep into Ernest's den, where brown paper, pieces of tin, bottles, jars, messes of every kind, and bad smells abounded.

Here his papa began to explain to him how it was that he had failed in the last experiment, and to give him some useful hints; but few of the others were sufficiently interested to remain, and they went back shivering to the library fire.

Helena had felt very nervous when she heard her guardian's voice, recalling so strongly her half-forgotten troubles, and she felt uncertain how he would

speak to her ; but, as he was going to show Ernest something, he wanted to put his hat and gloves out of the way, and his eyes falling upon her, he said, just in his old way, "Oh, Helena, put these on the table for me, will you?" and, with a thrill of pleasure, she felt that he had forgiven her, and obeyed him with alacrity.

CHAPTER XIII.

"HERE is a note for you, Bertha," said Captain Ellersley, when he joined them in the library. "I had almost forgotten it, although I promised Mrs. Cheveleigh it should be delivered without fail."

"I expected a message from her, with the name of a piece of music that I asked her about yesterday," said Bertha, as she took the note ; but it was longer than she expected, and it ran as follows :—

"DEAREST BERTHA,—I write to you in your capacity of governess. My dear, I have not yet got over the astounding piece of news you gave me yesterday.

"The beautiful and accomplished Miss Talbot to leave the world, and devote herself to the education of a parcel of children—girls I mean, I like boys—it is incredible. If she had become a nun, it would scarcely have been more wonderful. In earnest, *Bertamia*, I think that it is too great a sacrifice. If they

had all been little boys, now, like my Walter,—but girls, faugh! I should have thought you had had enough of them at school. Well, I will be serious for once, as I used to promise you so often, you dear old mentor; so listen to me. I am going to celebrate the coming of age, that is the first birthday of my boy. I know that he will quite enjoy it, and I want you to come, and I want all the little Ellersleys; but you must give the whole day to me,—next Thursday it is, and the young ones can come at six o'clock to the party. My compliments to Mrs. Ellersley, and I hope she will allow you to come (this is intended to pique you, *ma chère*), and of course I include the young ward in the invitation; and please make all this sound rational and respectful in the ears of your good aunt.

“I am so enchanted at the idea of your having come to live so near to us, that you must excuse my writing a great deal of nonsense to you just at first. —Ever yours, my dearest Bertha, most affectionately,
“DORA CHEVELEIGH.”

“It is a long note, I think,” said Mrs. Ellersley, as Bertha turned to the last page of the sheet of pink, perfumed paper.

Bertha's face had been very serious whilst she read, but it relaxed into a smile as she replied,—

“This reminds me of the notes that I used to have from dear Dora during the holidays. She is not much less a wild school-girl than she was then, I think.”

“No; Cheveleigh spoils her,” remarked Captain

Ellersley. "He is so charmed with her pretty ways and humours, that he can see no folly in her."

"Oh, not folly, uncle," said Bertha; "Dora is only gay and childish."

"Well," replied her uncle, "she seems to make a very fair mother, I will say that for her. And what does she say to you, Bertha? Something about a party, is it not?"

"Yes," said Bertha; "Mrs. Cheveleigh invites all the children to a birthday party on Thursday evening. It is in honour of little Walter."

"It is very kind of her, my dear," said Mrs. Ellersley; "but I scarcely know what to say. All of them, that is impossible, and they might get cold. What do you think, Arthur?"—to her husband.

"Oh no, mamma," put in Edith, who was listening eagerly to the discussion; "pray, let us all go."

"I do not think they would take cold," said Captain Ellersley; "and Mrs. Cheveleigh seemed quite bent upon it, but I could give her no decided answer."

"You are invited, too, my dear; are you not?" said Mrs. Ellersley to Bertha.

"Yes," replied her niece; "Dora wants me to spend the whole day with her; but that is out of the question. We cannot, however, send an answer until Monday morning, so there is time to consider the matter."

"Yes, that will be the best way," said Mrs. Ellersley. "I suppose the children would like to go?"

"Oh yes, mamma!" cried Edith and Marian. "Mrs. Cheveleigh gives such delightful parties. You

remember, Ernest, last New-Year's Eve? Oh, Bertha, you would have liked it!"—and they launched into a number of animated recollections of dancing, charades, and Christmas-trees, and Ernest declared that he would try to get leave from Mr. Barnard, and go with them. It was a little drawback to their anticipations to see that Bertha was looking grave, and an idea darted into their minds that perhaps she did not intend them to go; but, surely she would not prevent them. However, they had to go to bed without hearing the decision, and it was not until Monday morning that they knew their fate.

Helena had heard so much about the expected pleasures of the party, that she was almost as anxious as the rest to go; and listened eagerly when Mrs. Ellersley, just as they were finishing breakfast, said, in rather an unpromising voice,—

"Now, Arthur, will you tell the children what you have decided about their going to Cheveleigh on Thursday."

"That they shall not go!" said Captain Ellersley, shortly. "I think that Marian and Edith must be aware now that I know how they have been behaving lately. I certainly think that they do not merit such an indulgence. You will decline it, Bertha, as far as the children are concerned."

Marian held her head down, and Helena sat stiffly; but Edith cried,—“Oh! papa——” in a tone of the greatest disappointment; but the manner in which she was told that not another word would be heard upon the subject, was sufficient, and all were silent until they were summoned by Miss

Talbot into the library, which was, for the present, to be entirely their schoolroom. Here, by degrees, they got over their disappointment, and as their cousin deprived herself also of the pleasure of going, they could scarcely complain; but it was long before they liked to mention it, or to think of the reason why they were not allowed to go to the birthday party at Cheveleigh Manor.

The regular work under their cousin Bertha, the girls soon found to be a very different thing from the desultory lessons that they had been in the habit of doing lately, over which their mamma had daily mourned. Bertha allowed of no interruptions, and no lazy excuses. At first, Edith would jump up in the middle of a sum, and run to the window to kiss her hand to baby, as she passed to go out walking; or, if she heard her papa's voice in the hall, she would run out to see if he wanted anything, or to tell him where she thought he would find mamma. But Miss Talbot soon put a stop to this kind of trifling; and when Marian grew tired of a difficult exercise, or a drawing that would not come straight, and began, in her old way, to be pettish, or to complain of a headache, at first she was hurt to find that no pity was shown to her; but in time she was ashamed to try the experiment.

In fact, as the girls confided to Ernest, at the end of the second week, it was just as bad as having a real governess. "Bertha is so dreadfully strict," said Edith, "she won't let us do anything but what she orders; and she is so cross at the least thing."

"Oh, Edith!" said Helena, joining the discussion, "she is not cross—only sorry."

"You may say so," said Marian, quickly, "because Bertha has never once scolded you; and you have not half the hard things to do that I have, although you are older."

"My lessons are just as hard to me as yours are," retorted Helena, "because I have never done some of the things before."

This was true, for Helena's education had been so peculiar, that whilst in some branches, such as writing and arithmetic, she was far beyond the others, yet in the more feminine accomplishments she had to begin at the beginning, like a little child; and this, Bertha considered, was in itself a trial to so womanly a girl.

"Well, but, Marian," said Edith, who was beginning always to take Helena's part, and thus often aggravated Marian's jealousy, "you know on Thursday—but I will tell you, Ernest, how it was, and you shall be the judge. You know the old piano in mamma's dressing-room?"

"Oh, Edith, pray do not!" interrupted Helena.

"Now, Edie, I am not going to have any of your tales, if Helena does not like it. Hold your tongue," said Ernest.

"But just for you to see if Bertha favours her. May I not, Helena?"

"Well, I don't care, then," said Helena, blushing a good deal, though, and setting herself to the task of putting her writing-desk in order.

"Listen, Ernest, then," continued Edith. "Helena

had to practise on that old piano for an hour, and she has only to play scales and things, so she was soon sick of it; and she sat down in that nice little easy-chair, and began to read 'Amy Herbert' comfortably, till Bertha happened to find her there, and then she was very cross, and she said she could not trust Helena, and she must treat her like a child; and she made her take 'Amy Herbert' away herself, and told her not to touch it for a fortnight; and then she sat beside her till she had quite finished her hour's practising, although she wanted to walk with papa somewhere, I know. And Helena has been miserable ever since, because Bertha said she was not to be trusted, and she has tried to be very particular with everything she has been told to do, in hopes that Bertha may trust her again. Now, Ernest!"

"Your case is proved, decidedly!" said Ernest, yawning, and stretching out his arms; "and Helena is driven away."

It was true. Helena had soon shut her writing-desk, and slipped out of the room.

"Well, I will not interfere. I can only say that I am glad that you have some one at last to keep you in order—you have wanted it long enough,—only I don't envy Bertha. What with laziness, and squabbings, and jealousies, she must have a hard life amongst you. But now, come, one of you, and make me a worm-bag, for I expect to get some fishing this afternoon."

Ernest was not far wrong in saying that Bertha had a hard life amongst her new pupils. At first, when everything was new, and she had their old

affection to stand her in good stead, she got on pretty well with them; but in a short time they began to regard her less as cousin, more as governess, and her task became more difficult.

Their faults seemed to develop as the restraint and novelty of the new rules and habits wore off. Edith was so thoughtless and so unsteady; Marian's temper was always ready to fail; and Helena required constant patience and attention—for in her case there was the neglect of years to make up,—yet every sign of forbearance towards Helena's proud indifference, or of allowance for her want of knowledge, was set down by Marian as partiality, and made her brow contract with envy.

At such times Bertha scarcely dared to leave them together. She knew that they would be like flint and steel, and she particularly wished to avoid letting Helena have anything painful for her mind to dwell upon, such as a decided quarrel with Marian would be; and, knowing that industry is the greatest friend to cheerfulness, she tried to keep them constantly employed and interested in some pursuit, in order that bad feelings might have no time to grow. And in a few weeks her pains seemed to meet with some little reward. Marian's old wishes to excel had roused in her a spirit of application; and Helena did all that she was told to do, and rarely broke the rules that had been made for her.

Still Miss Talbot was not comfortable about her. There was no want of deep feeling: a word of reproof from Bertha would make the colour rush to her cheeks, and, far from resenting it, she clung to her the more;

but the impulse quickly died away each time, and left her listless and indifferent. She took little real interest in anything, except now and then, when she was roused up into excitement; and Bertha suspected that she was fretting inwardly at the prospect of leaving Oakridge, and the uncertainty that attended the time of her going, which was now never mentioned. And Bertha was confirmed in this opinion by a little incident that occurred at the breakfast-table one morning, after the post-boy had arrived.

A variety of letters had come for Captain Ellersley, as usual. Some he laid aside, some he opened, and amongst these was one which, after he had looked at it, he passed up the table to his wife, saying, "I think that will do, my dear."

Mrs. Ellersley received it without remark, and quickly laid it down again; but Bertha, in taking the open paper from her uncle, could not help observing that it was the prospectus of a ladies' school. She felt sure that Helena, who sat next to her, had seen it also, for she noticed that directly afterwards her hand trembled so much that she could scarcely raise her tea-cup to her lips; and Bertha resolved, as soon as possible, to tell her uncle what she had seen, and how sure she was that the suspense was doing his ward some injury.

Almost immediately after breakfast she had an opportunity of doing so, for her uncle himself spoke to her upon the very subject, and she was able to beg of him to change his plans for Helena.

"I am convinced that she is dreading the prospect very much," said Bertha. "She looks upon school as

a sort of exile—and, indeed, I think it would be such to her. I believe that it is home affections that she needs; and to send her out again amongst strangers might chill her hopelessly.”

“It is very good of you to say so, my dear,” replied her uncle, “for she must be troublesome to you sometimes. I saw, only yesterday, how she stalked out of the room like a tragedy queen, because you had told her to do something she did not like.”

“But she did it well, and was most humble all the day afterwards,” interrupted Bertha.

Her uncle smiled at her eagerness.

“Well, Bertha, I must say that you have done wonders with all the children. Your aunt is very much pleased. With regard to Helena, I must keep to my decision; but I think we will not send her to this Mrs. Brown’s—we will look a little further.”

This was all that Bertha could obtain, and she went to her duties rather dispirited, and not quite so well able as usual to cope with the boisterous spirits of Master Willie.

That young gentleman was rather more troublesome than usual, and had just been sent away into the nursery, when Captain Ellersley came into the library—a most unusual thing during lesson-hours.

“Bertha,” he said, “I want some letters copied. Is there anybody here who will help me?”

“We shall all be glad to do what we can,” answered Bertha, smiling. “Is it what the girls can do?”

“I only want this notice copied. It has come down from the War-office this morning. The copies should be out to-morrow. It is most inconvenient, as

I have let my clerk go away for his holiday. I should be really glad of your assistance."

"May I help, papa?" said Marian, whilst Helena's eyes made the same request.

"Helena and Marian can both write well enough, I think, said Bertha; "so we will put away our books, and begin at once.

"Oh, I wish I could write small-hand fast," cried Edith. "Mayn't I try, papa?" and she took a pen, and scrawled upon an exercise-book such a strange "Edith Ellersley," that her papa laughed, and shook his head.

"You must write a few more round-hand copies, Edie, before you can be my secretary," he said; "and now I must bring you the materials, Bertha."

In a few minutes he returned, with a quantity of paper and new pens, and, with the notice they were to copy, laid them upon the table.

"I am sorry to disturb the studies, Bertha," he said, "but it will be really a help to me. I only want the copies to be written clearly, and without mistake. When you have finished a few of them, pray bring them into my study. If I am not there, they can be laid upon the table;" and so saying, Captain Ellersley left them to their labours.

"Oh, how nice!" sighed Edith, when she saw them each take a sheet of clean paper and one of the new pens. "I am sure that I could do one. Last Christmas, when I wrote to Uncle Edward, he said that it was very good for my age. Do let me try, Bertha!"

Poor Edith was told to confine her writing powers

to the exercise that was lying neglected before her, and not to disturb her companions by talking. And then they all set to work—Helena with trembling eagerness,—so anxious was she to do well the first thing that her guardian had entrusted her with.

When they had each finished a copy, Bertha proposed that they should go and show their work, in order to see if it was done properly.

Of course Edith would go with them—"that she might open the doors," she said.

Captain Ellersley was pleased with all; but while to Marian he only said, "Cross your *t*'s a little lower down, my dear, and yours will do nicely,"—when Helena showed her nice, clear copy, written in a bold and rather too manly hand, he said, "Excellent, Helena! Really, that is well done—so like your poor father's, too. I shall be making you my private secretary, if Bertha does not take care!" and he laid his hand kindly upon her shoulder.

The tears started to Helena's eyes, and her heart beat with pleasure as she listened to this praise; and Bertha was so glad, too, that neither of them noticed the black cloud of envy that was gathering over Marian's face; but it was not long before she showed them that she was in one of her most peevish humours, by declaring, as soon as they returned to the school-room, that Helena had taken the only pen that she could write with.

Helena was not inclined to give it up; but a word from Bertha settled that little dispute, and they proceeded quietly with their work, until they were interrupted by an important question from Edith.

"Bertha, why do you make your capital *A*'s the same as small ones?"

"They are not the same, Edith—they are a different size," replied her cousin.

Edith's tongue, however, once having been loosed again, she was not contented with this little episode.

"Oh, what do you think, Bertha? I quite forgot to tell you. Nurse had propped baby up against a chair for a minute this morning, when Helena was going in, and baby screamed out, and actually went two steps, before she flopped down upon the floor, and then she began to cry."

"Oh, Edith," exclaimed Marian, "how tiresome you are! I have written 'expects every baby.'"

Edith burst into a fit of merry laughter, and Helena could not help joining her, but Bertha said,—

"My dear Edith, it is impossible to copy correctly when you are chattering. If you have finished your exercise, look over the history that I pointed out to you this morning, and be silent until your school-hours are over."

For about ten minutes Edith actually obeyed, but at the end of that time she spoke again.

"Please, Bertha, let me ask just one thing: it is useful. Why did not Queen Eleanor die when she sucked the poison out of the king's wounds?"

"Because some poisons that kill if introduced into the blood, are harmless when only swallowed," answered Bertha.

"Thank you," said Edith; and her curls for a moment bent again over the history—but it was only for a moment.

"Bertha, what do you think? Bessy says that everybody says that Thomas Pearson poisoned his wife."

"Edith, take your book into the dining-room until I come to you," said Bertha, gravely. "You said that you wished to help your papa; but by this chattering you hinder us, and deprive him of our assistance."

"Oh, but Bertha," began the little incorrigible.

"Go directly, Edith; I am angry with you!" insisted Bertha; and with some tears, that threatened to interfere with the study of Queen Eleanor, Edith left the room, and they were once more quiet.

But it was only for a short time. Presently strange sounds were heard—screams and laughter. They seemed to come from the dining-room, and Bertha felt obliged to go and see what was the matter. She found Edith in full chase round the dining-table after Willie, who had snatched her history from her; but they both seemed to be enjoying the game amazingly. Bertha's entrance, however, stopped it.

"I could not help it, Bertha; Willie would tease me," was Edith's excuse; but it was unavailing. Willie was sent again to the nursery, and Edith restored to the schoolroom, where, sitting at the window, she could at least be under Bertha's eye.

But the brief interval of her absence had not been lost by Marian and Helena. There had been a shake given by one, and an angry reproach by the other. Some other little incivilities had passed between them, and when Marian, in reaching awkwardly for some ink, had dropped a piece of black sediment upon the letter that Helena had just finished carefully, the latter,

without waiting for Marian to explain that it was quite an accident, and irritated by many previous little taunts, flew into a violent passion, and her voice was loud, and her face flushed with rage, when Miss Talbot came back into the room.

As soon as she felt Bertha's eye upon her, her loud invectives ceased, but she still looked indignant; Marian, on the contrary, was deeply injured, though quiet and silent—for she knew from experience that she was unequal to cope with Helena in a war of words. Edith, Marian, Helena, all going wrong together; Ernest would have said, again, that Bertha had a hard life of it. If she thought so, however, she certainly did not show it, for it was in the most gentle voice that she desired Helena to be silent.

“When you are in a better mood, I shall ask for an explanation; at present, I will not hear a word from either of you.”

Thus quiet was restored, and the semblance, at least, of peace; though the stormy feelings that were still working in two of the party made this peace a hollow one.

At half-past twelve, Mrs. Ellersley, as usual, looked in upon them, and was surprised to see their occupation. But instead of Edith or Helena volunteering a lively explanation of their novel labours, all the speaking fell to Bertha's lot, and it almost seemed as if the others had undertaken the task unwillingly.

“Had they not better walk now, Bertha?” said Mrs. Ellersley. “Too much stooping is so bad for them, and Helena looks very pale this morning.”

“Certainly, dear aunt,” said Bertha. “We can finish

easily after dinner." And she told them to get ready, but she remained behind herself, to speak to Edith, who was to stay at home. With her usual thoughtless good temper the little girl tried to coax Bertha into forgiving her, and it was some time before she could be convinced that she had been tiresome and disobedient. Then she was very unhappy, and really sorry, and before Bertha left her, she eagerly promised to do nothing but her lessons whilst they were out.

But she had not calculated upon another disappointment. She was no sooner left alone than her papa, to make up to her for not being able to assist him, came to invite her to drive with him to the town, and she was obliged, with some tears, and an attempt to hide them by smiles, to confess that she did not think she ought to go, because she had promised Bertha not to leave the schoolroom until dinner-time.

"Of course, then, I cannot take you," said her father, looking annoyed; "I am afraid Bertha has a great deal of trouble with you;" and he left Edith more unhappy than ever.

When Marian and Helena went up stairs to prepare for their walk, no words were exchanged between them, and Helena began to be very miserable. She thought it was all Marian's doing. "Marian might have left me alone, the short time that I may have to stay here," she said to herself. "Miss Talbot did not know how she had been teasing me, when she looked so grave because I was in a passion; and how could I help being vexed. I know that Marian did it on purpose; at least,"—and truth, which will speak for itself to the conscience, made her pause a moment,—

"at least she might have helped it. I suppose that Miss Talbot is very angry with me, and that she will tell Captain Ellersley, and I may have to go away directly. Well, I shall know whose fault it is; and as I shall never be happy anywhere, it does not matter much where I am, so I shan't think about it," and tying her hat-strings with a jerk, she finished dressing, and went down stairs.

Willie was in the hall, trying to persuade Bertha to let him sound the gong to summon the two dilatory ones. He generally walked with them now: it kept him out of mischief for an hour or two, and left the nurseries comparatively quiet whilst Miss Baby was having her noonday sleep.

As Helena had expected, Bertha looked very grave, but she looked tired too, and not very well, and this softened Helena a little, and she tried to take her arm as usual, when they turned into some fields that led to the village; but the arm was quietly withdrawn, and Helena felt hurt.

"May we go past Elgey's?" asked Willie; "I want so much to see the idiot boy, that screams like a parrot."

"We shall go that way," said Bertha, "for I am going to take a flannel petticoat from your mamma to poor old Elsie. But Willie, my boy, if the poor idiot should be out to-day, do not forget, when you see him, to be thankful that you have all your senses, and mind that you always use them well."

"Yes," said Willie, thoughtfully. He liked to be talked to sometimes in a rational way; but in three minutes he was at the other side of the field, where

there was a small horse-pond, and he soon came racing back to announce, with great glee, that the pond was frozen over, for he had put his foot upon the edge, and it had not gone in. On Saturday Ernest would bring him here to learn to slide. Ernest had promised to do so, as soon as there was any ice ; and, setting the good news to music, he began to chant it merrily, and to skip on before them, until they reached a row of neat-looking cottages that stood at the side of the road before you turned into the village.

The idiot was not outside—it was probably too cold for him, and Willie was disappointed. He stood, however, in the road, all the time that the others were in old Elsie's, hoping to catch a glimpse of him, or at least to hear him scream. The old woman was in bed, bad with rheumatics, and she was most grateful for the petticoat, and also for a promise from Bertha that she would come again as soon as she had time, to sit with her awhile.

As they came out of old Elsie's cottage, they saw a girl, about twelve years old, lifting the latch of the next door. Bertha had begun to teach at the Sunday school lately, and she generally took either Helena or Marian with her, in the hope of interesting them in such things, and all three quickly recognised the girl as one of those in Bertha's class.

"Why were you not at school last Sunday, Lydia?" asked Miss Talbot, as the girl turned round to make her curtsy.

"Please ma'am, my mother wouldn't let me come," replied the girl; and Bertha said no more, for that is always a difficult answer to deal with, because a

mother's authority should not be lightly interfered with. But whilst she paused, the door opened from inside, and a woman, clean and tidy in her dress, but with a red face, and a fiery look about her eyes, appeared in the door-way.

"No ma'am," she began, in a loud harsh voice, "I did not let her go to the school on Sunday, and if you like, I'll tell you the reason of it. I expect that my Lydia's quite as good as Mary Elliot's girl—and why is she to be put before her, and noticed by the quality?—and if Lydia happens to be five minutes late, it must be set against her, and more work than enough made about it. And I mean to tell Mr. Arnott so, when he comes to see after her, as I suppose he will—not that it's often the parson comes to a clean house like mine; if my children were in rags, and I went whining about as some folks do, I might be put on the clothing-club; but if people keep themselves respectable, there is little notice taken of them. No, I won't have Mary Elliot calling me, as if I didn't keep my children a deal more to themselves than she does. I'd be ashamed to have them running about the streets as hers do, like tramps and nothing better—so she knows."

The woman stopped, for want of breath. Miss Talbot was much puzzled to know the meaning of this volley of abuse, and she said,—

"I scarcely understand what it is you complain of. If Lydia comes late, she loses her mark, and I am sure that you, who are so orderly in your own house, must know that a school can't be kept up without rules and order. And as to her being noticed, if Lydia learns

her lessons and behaves well, she will be as much noticed as any other girl."

"Oh yes, it's all very fine!" replied the woman, rudely. "You are soft-tongued enough, but when it comes to the clothing-club, we shall see; only Mary Elliot shan't have it to say a second time, what she has said, that she shan't."

It was no use arguing with the woman; her features were distorted with rage, and she was not fit to listen to reason, so Miss Talbot only said, gravely,—

"I hope that you will not deprive Lydia of the advantages of school on account of any quarrel that you may have with a neighbour. I do not understand the matter, but probably there is some mistake at the bottom; and, at any rate, you had better forgive and forget, as all Christians should do, knowing how much need we all have to be forgiven;" and, without waiting for a reply, Miss Talbot bid her good morning, and they walked away, without any remark being made upon the scene that they had just been witness to.

"Forgive and forget," thought Helena, as they returned in silence. "I think that would do just as well for Marian and me. I wish I could say it. I know Bertha would say I ought. I wonder if I looked like that hideous woman when I felt so angry with Marian this morning, and the passion rose up in my breast until I could have struck her. Oh, dear! how wicked I am! How much I need forgiveness! If I were only at home I would kneel down and pray!" And as these thoughts passed through her mind, the tears of repentance rolled down her cheeks. She thought of her sinful passions with bitter pain, and

her desire to cast them away from her became intense. The many good things that she had heard during the past few weeks came to her remembrance, and a thirst for holiness came upon her.

"I will be different," she said to herself; "I will learn to be gentle. I will stop these passions, and I will try not to be selfish. Every year that I live, I will be better than I was before. I will never cease to strive; then it will not matter where I am, for I shall have the same work to do, in myself, that I carry about with me; and if I am trying to do this, Bertha says I shall never feel alone."

And thus, whilst Helena was humbled at the thought of her faults, she was not so wretched as before, because she had now the desire and intention to forsake them entirely; and this desire gave her a degree of happiness, because it came from God.

As we have said, Miss Talbot and the girls were not inclined to talk, and Willie, finding them rather stupid companions, continued to seek amusement for himself. He had a wish to have a ride upon a young horse that was cantering about one of the fields they had to pass through; but not finding that plan feasible, he contented himself with clambering up the bank of a hedge, for the purpose of gathering a bunch of holly; but, alas! the bank gave way with him, and, without the holly, he rolled down into the ditch, not injuring himself, but both dirtying and tearing a new suit of winter clothes. He was rather dismayed, after he had scrambled out of the ditch, to see the damage that had been done; but instead of answering Bertha's rather anxious question as to whether he was hurt, he

set off home as fast as he could, that he might shelter himself under the rather doubtful protection of his nurse.

They were not more than the length of a field from home at the time; the morning had been cold and misty, but just now the sun broke out, and threw a bright light upon the house and trees beyond.

"That is pretty, Helena, is it not?" said Miss Talbot.

Helena heard her name, and started, but she had not the least idea what was said, and the tears that had been standing in her eyes, now fell upon her dress. Bertha seemed to understand her thoughts, and before they entered the house, she paused a moment to say,—

"If you are sorry, dear child, go to your room awhile, and seek the gentleness you need."

Helena pressed the hand that had taken hers, and went at once up stairs.

It would seem that she had found what she had been desired to seek, for when the gong summoned her to dinner, Helena appeared with a softened aspect. Her cheek was still flushed, and her eyes brighter than usual, but there was much less of the reserved and independent air that generally showed even in the way she crossed the floor, and her whole demeanour was subdued.

Not so Marian; she had heard some words pass between her cousin and Helena before they went up stairs, and was furious at what she considered to be Bertha's partiality in speaking thus to Helena alone.

She scarcely had patience to see Helena pass through her room, and, as soon as possible, she hastened down again to the schoolroom, where she nourished her bad feelings until dinner-time. And when, at dinner, in answer to her papa's inquiries about the progress of their work, Helena replied, with rather a trembling voice, it is true, but with a smile and animation quite new to her, Marian, supposing that all this arose from triumph at Bertha's favour, hated Helena at that moment with something of Cain's hatred. And when, after dinner, Helena hastened to her in the hall, and, with an effort that nearly took away her breath, said, "Marian, forgive me; I was very wrong this morning," Marian only said, with a look of scorn, "Go and tell that to Bertha," and flung aside the hand of reconciliation.

It can scarcely be wondered that Helena's new-born courage gave way, and that at first she said, with some impatience, "It is no use trying." But a short time spent quietly beside Mrs. Ellersley, who had the baby in the drawing-room, where she was soothed by kindness, and also had time for reflection, brought back her good resolutions; and when she went back to the schoolroom, she had resolved not to mind Marian's humour, and, if she should vex her ever so, that she would bite her tongue, rather than say anything cross in return.

But it was a hard struggle. Helena's feelings were so sensitive, and so fully alive to the least unkindness, that a scornful look or gesture of Marian's was quite sufficient to irritate her deeply; and once she had even begun an angry retort, when she remembered in time,

and bravely closed her lips again, the next moment handing Marian something that she thought she wanted.

Helena did not know it, but Bertha was watching her with a thrill of gladness that even all her anxiety for poor Marian could not destroy. Some little time after this, when Helena had finished a nice-looking copy, Miss Talbot took it up, and exclaimed,—

“Why, Helena, you have written, ‘are required to forgive and forget.’ It is a good motto; but I scarcely think that Captain Ellersley meant to impress it upon his correspondents.”

Helena was covered with confusion as she took it back, and she felt very much inclined to tear the sheet in two; but she resisted the hasty impulse, and prepared to write another.

Marian yawned over hers, and seemed quite tired of the business; and when the required number of copies had been made, and Bertha’s and Helena’s were finished, hers, the last, was incomplete, and she sighed over it mournfully.

“You may take mine with yours into the study,” said Bertha to Helena, “and tell my uncle that Marian will very soon have done the last.”

Helena was rather long in coming back, and Miss Talbot looked up inquiringly.

“Captain Ellersley was not there,” said Helena, in answer to the look. “I met Bessy bringing baby in, and she says that a gentleman is with him in the stables.”

“I can take mine, then, before papa comes in,” said Marian, who had at last completed hers.

She scarcely had patience to see Helena go to your papa's room, and, as soon as possible, she came, too," she said again to the schoolroom, where she had been waiting for her feelings until dinner-time. As she was on her errand, answer to her papa's inquiry in the schoolroom, when their work, Helena replied, as he entered,— "voice, it is true, but will you done your work?" new to her, Marian said Bertha; "you will find all from triumph at that moment with your study table."

when, after all," said Captain Ellersley, looking hall, and, I am sure that it has been a great help breath, I will now go and send them off, together this of my own, which I had just finished when I was scor with my own, which I had just finished when I was th called away to speak to Todd, the veterinary surgeon. But first let me see if I have not got something for you in return. How would you like to hear Madame sing?"

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Marian, in a tone of delight; whilst Helena looked up wondering.

"They are coming to — to-morrow, so we must see if mamma will take us all." And Captain Ellersley, with an air of satisfaction at the pleasure that he knew he was going to bestow, pulled out of his pocket a little parcel, containing six tickets and a programme of a grand concert which was to be given the next day at the town where Ernest was at school.

Captain Ellersley had only just left the room, when Edith and her mamma, who had been out for a walk together, came in, and were quickly told of the treat in prospect. Mrs. Ellersley shook her head at the

her joining the party, but sympathized with the shyness of her girls.

She had never heard any public singing, but she had listened to Miss Talbot for hours, and the prospect of going to the concert made her heart beat high. Marian, who had just begun to sing lessons, and had been at concerts before, was in raptures.

Edith exclaimed, "How kind of papa to give me a ticket, when I have not been helping him;" and she gave a glance at her cousin, which said, "and when I was so naughty, too."

"We are the drones, I think, Edie," said her mother; "but we must not always expect to get the honey without working for it."

As she spoke, the study-bell rang loudly, and Captain Ellersley was heard through the open doors speaking hastily to Susan.

"What can be the matter?" said Mrs. Ellersley, making a few steps towards the door; but she was stopped by the entrance of her husband, who threw a hurried glance around, then fixed it upon his niece, and said,—

"Will you come this way, Bertha?"

She followed him to the study, and he pointed to his desk, on which lay a number of papers, and at the top a little bottle overturned, which was labelled "Dissolved gum."

The gum had entirely oozed out of the bottle, and had spread itself over the papers. When Bertha touched them, she found that several were stuck together.

“All spoiled!” said her uncle, hurriedly; “and it is impossible to make copies of them in time for the first post. I was a fool to let Jones go off for his holiday when I knew that I might want him for this purpose any day.”

“It is a most grievous thing,” said Bertha. “Have you any idea, dear uncle, how it has occurred?”

“Evidently from my carelessness in leaving the uncorked bottle upon my desk,” replied her uncle. “It would not require much shaking to overturn it. Then, look here,”—and he pointed to the circular that he had received that morning;—“it is my opinion that Helena had caught sight of the corner of this paper about the school, which was in the middle of my papers, and, naturally anxious to see the whole of it, drew it out, and thus upset the bottle.”

“She will tell you at once, if that was the case,” said Bertha. “Will you ask her?”

“If you think it will not lead her into any deceit,” said Captain Ellersley, who had a horror of anything like a scene. “You see, as it was chiefly my own fault, I do not wish to make a fuss about it, as I might be obliged to do if——”

But Bertha only said, “Pray ask her, dear uncle; she abhors falsehood; and I think, if she had done it, she would have told you before now;” and, as she spoke, she led the way back into the schoolroom, where the rest were assembled in expectation.

Bertha waited for him to speak; so he said, in a voice which he meant to be kind and encouraging,—

“Did you throw down a bottle of gum in my study, Helena?”

"No, sir," replied Helena at once, raising her large eyes to his with an expression of surprise.

"You might do it accidentally, in drawing this paper out, for instance."

Helena started when she saw the circular, and turned very red, and Captain Ellersley continued,—

"Do not be afraid to tell me, my dear: it might be done almost without your knowing it."

Helena at once assumed her most defiant air, and exclaimed,—

"Do you not believe me, sir?"

Bertha threw a quick, reproving glance upon her; but she went on, bitterly,—

"I did not throw the bottle down—I would not have touched any of your papers;—you think everything bad of me;" and, choking with indignation, she leaned her head upon her hand, to hide the starting tears.

"No, my dear; we do not, indeed," said Mrs. Ellersley, putting her arm round her. "Captain Ellersley believes you, I am sure."

"Your word is sufficient, Helena," said her guardian, shortly; for he was puzzled, and almost disappointed that he had been wrong in his conjecture. "Did I not tell you long ago that I would trust you?"

"Yes," said Helena, humbly; "I did not mean to speak in that way."

"Well, well," said her guardian, hastily, "I should not have been very angry if you had been the culprit, for, as far as the gum was concerned, it was chiefly my fault. It must have been you then, Marian."

Now, Marian had been very uneasy ever since the

first ringing of the study bell ; for it was true that she had yielded to a dishonourable impulse of curiosity, and had drawn the paper out ; but, hearing her father's voice close to the hall door, she had hastily pushed it back again, and made her escape,—not, however, without hearing that something small had fallen down ; she did not know what it was ; but as soon as her father spoke of the accident, she felt sure that she had been the cause of it, and quick as that feeling came the wish to conceal her fault.

How could she confess what Helena threw off so indignantly ? and with a scarcely acknowledged desire that a suspicion might still rest upon her rival, whilst she thoroughly despised herself for all, her lips moved with the evasive answer,—

“I never saw the gum, papa. I laid the papers down, and came away almost directly.”

“Well, it is very strange,” replied her father, “and most provoking, too. I must, however, go and see if any of the things are fit to send off by this post ;—it will be very annoying if none can go.”

“Do let me help you, uncle !” said Bertha, and she followed him from the room.

With her assistance, he soon had the comfort of finding that some at least could be used, and the rest Bertha prevailed upon him to allow her to assist in copying anew ; so that, before the end of the evening, the whole mischief was remedied, and many of the papers sent away.

CHAPTER XIV.

No further notice was taken of the affair, except that Mrs. Ellersley once, during tea, after remarking that it was very unfortunate, said that perhaps, after all, nobody might be exactly to blame for the accident, as the study door was much given to shutting violently, and a sudden gust of wind might close it with a bang, and shake everything in the room. This explanation seemed to satisfy every one; but the escape from being found out was not sufficient to make Marian happy.

She tried several kinds of employment during the evening; but whether she was reading, or drawing, or working at a new kind of embroidery that Bertha had begun to teach her, there was constantly something heavy at her heart, that she could not in any way get rid of. Happy it was for Marian that her conscience was not yet hardened enough to let her sin without great suffering.

At last she made a compact with herself, and resolved that when they came back from the concert she would tell her papa that she believed she had overturned the gum; it was impossible to tell him before; she might not perhaps then be allowed to go to the concert, and she could not run the risk of that.

So she kept her own counsel; and after she had decided upon her course, she was a little more

comfortable, though she still showed that she was in a thoroughly bad humour. This she vented entirely upon Helena, as opportunity offered, until at last her pettishness even attracted her mother's attention, and she, though generally more ready to soothe her eldest daughter's waywardness than to reprove it, said, "You should not answer Helena so crossly, my dear. You can easily reach the India-rubber."

"Always Helena!" said Marian to herself, as she half tossed to Helena what she had asked her for, and her ill feelings were increased.

It was in this mood that she went up stairs; not to bed, for Bertha had given her some books to carry into her room, and had desired her to stay there till she came; for she did not yet despair of reconciling the two girls before they sought their pillows; and for this purpose she first followed Helena.

The latter was sitting in her old corner of the window-seat in her own room, looking out upon the stars. Bessy, the nursery-maid, meanwhile, had been arranging some things for her, but left the room as Miss Talbot entered.

"They are beautiful, are they not?" said Bertha, sitting down beside her.

"Do you see that one?" said Helena, without turning her head round, and she pointed to the evening star, which shone in all its quiet majesty between the two elm-trees.

"Yes," said Bertha; "that is a favourite star with all who care to look upon these glorious things."

"I like it, and yet it pains me," continued Helena.

"It is the star Sirius—I know its name because I used to be told all about them once,—it is the star that came out when I was walking to the farm-house that night, and when I look at it, I think how weary I was, and how my heart was beating up and down, and the whole world seemed a wilderness to me, and no friend but that star, and then the mist seemed to close around me, the star was hid, and I was quite alone."

"Not quite alone," said Miss Talbot, gently. "The mercy of your Heavenly Father was watching over you. My dear Helena, never look out upon that star without being thankful. Remember the pain you suffered when you wandered so far from the right path, if you like; but remember, too, the love of God, that brought His wandering child back again, and gave her the opportunity of retracing her steps, and fitting herself for His service. Ah, Helena! does not your heart bless God, who did not forget His child?"

"I do," said Helena; in a low voice, "but I am not worthy: you do not know how bad I am—my heart is so full of unkind thoughts; and if I do one thing right, I get proud of it, and then I do something wrong again directly."

"No one is worthy," said Bertha,—"no one can ever be; but they are not the less bound to take upon them the easy yoke, and to learn of Him who was gentle and obedient. It is a happy service, and a safe one. When you are tempted to go astray, think of the pain and weariness of that misty night, when even the star faded from your sight; and by the light of the Sun of Righteousness return quickly, that you may live."

Helena did not speak, but she still looked out upon the stars, and prayed that she might never forget that night.

The silence was broken presently by Miss Talbot, who said,—

“And now, Helena, since you tell me that you know that you have been unkind, and that you have done wrong in many ways, I need, perhaps, hardly remind you of your sad violence this morning; but I would ask you, have you tried to make amends? It is of little use confessing your sin to God or man if you are not willing to be reconciled.”

“I told Marian that I was sorry,” said Helena, sitting straight up, and speaking in quite a different tone; “but she was scornful, and would not listen to me.”

Bertha was rather surprised to hear this, but she only said,—

“That was right of you; but did you do it as gently as you could?—did you feel quite kindly towards her at the time?”

“Yes, I did,” said Helena; “I thought how nice it would be if she would only love me, and I was sorry that I had said such unkind things to her. It is natural that she should be soon vexed with me, because I am in her way. Mrs. Ellersley and everybody is so kind to me, and she thinks that I take part of their love from her; but I shall soon be gone, so it does not matter much.”

“Oh, yes, it does matter, dear child,” said Bertha; “everything matters. We are always in the right way, or out of it. I am deeply grieved to hear that poor Marian scorned your offer of reconciliation; but

do not let your heart close against her on that account. You have many failings of your own, so bear with hers. Trust that she will soon understand that you are really anxious to be friends with her. I dare say that she is sorry now, and I hope that she will soon not only cease to grudge you our love, but will give you plenty of her own to add to it."

Helena shook her head, as if that was too much to expect, but Miss Talbot continued,—

"I have been very glad to see your endeavours to do right to-day. Go on striving, so that every day may see you more gentle and unselfish, and more resolved to be active and cheerful in whatever position you may be in. And remember, dear Helena, all your life, if you want to be happy, that before you lay your head down on your pillow every night, you must first lay down every ill feeling, every unkind thought, every impatient wish, at the foot of the Cross, that the angels may watch over you with gladness, and that you may be able to say, 'I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest, for it is thou, Lord, only, that makest me to dwell in safety.'"

Miss Talbot found Marian in a very different mood. With the sin of concealment nourished in her heart, it was not very likely that she would give much heed to the good counsel of her cousin. She maintained that Helena was cross and unbearable, that everybody made more fuss about her than enough, and that she was truly glad to think that in a short time they should be rid of her for some months, at least. It was no use speaking to her, she had steeled her heart against the voice of kindness,—indeed, she durst not

give way to any softer feeling, for that might lead to her giving up everything; but she was rather startled when her cousin said, at last,—

“If your papa, Marian, were to know that you were keeping up such a wicked temper against your companion, I much doubt whether he would be willing to allow you such an indulgence as he has planned for you to-morrow evening. His kindness ought to make you try to be more amiable!”

This was a new idea to Marian; but the possibility of her thus losing what she had schemed so sadly to secure only vexed her the more, and she answered indignantly,—

“It would be hard if I might not go to the concert because Helena chose to get into a tremendous passion with me.”

She would not be softened; and Bertha, finding that she was only getting worse, and losing all her respect of manner, was obliged, most unwillingly, to send her away, without her having shown a symptom of better feeling.

CHAPTER XV.

THERE was a great calm amongst the young people the next morning ; and it would seem as if the storms of the day before had passed away. Marian knew that Bertha was watching her, and that she would notice the first signal of ill humour ; so, at least in outward seeming, she was friends with Helena, whilst the latter was only too anxious to test her new resolutions, by being cheerful, and industrious, and kind to Marian. As for Edith, she was full of glee from the first opening of her eyes ; and as soon as she had ascertained that she might wear a certain blue tarlatane frock that Ernest liked better than any other that she had, her satisfaction was complete. She went about singing to herself, playing with the little ones, kissing the baby, and running errands for any one ; she even carried her spirits and her chatter into the school-room, and it was not till Bertha, by a very grave look, had reminded her of the mishaps of yesterday, that she was sufficiently steadied to attend to her lessons properly.

Helena was attentive, but she was very anxious to finish all her lessons,—so anxious that Miss Talbot noticed it, and had to restrain her impatience several times ; but when they had finished, and a heavy shower of rain prevented their usual walk, the reason of her haste appeared.

"Do stay a minute with me," she said to Miss Talbot, who had been giving her a music lesson.

"I should have thought you wished me gone half an hour ago," said Miss Talbot, smiling, "you seemed so anxious to come to the end of your exercises."

"So I did," said Helena, blushing; "but I did not want you to go. Do you remember the person that came with me that morning?"

Bertha did not recollect; but a little explanation made her understand that it was Mrs. Bray that Helena meant, and that morning meant the eventful one on which she returned to Oakridge.

"She was very kind to me; you have no idea how good she seemed, and Janet, too; and they both did so very much to oblige me. Do you think that I might send them something?"

"They have not been forgotten," replied Bertha. "Captain Ellersley has ridden over once to see them. They would accept no reward; but I believe he is going to make Mr. Bray a present of some newly-invented machine that he thinks he will not refuse."

"How very kind of my guardian," said Helena; "but do you think, Bertha, that he would object to my doing something myself for Mrs. Bray that she would like."

"No, I am sure he would not," answered Bertha; "and I think it would be proper of you, dear Helena."

"Well, then, I thought that I should like to knit her a warm gray shawl, like that Mrs. Ellersley is doing," said Helena. "I could easily learn the stitch, I think."

"But you have many other things to do; and you are not fond of work," objected Bertha.

"I should have plenty of time in the evening," replied Helena; "and I should be fond of doing this, because it would be so nice to make it for Mrs. Bray. I would not neglect anything else for it, indeed, Bertha."

"Then I have no other objection to make; so let us go at once to Mrs. Ellersley, and hear what she has to say."

Helena was sure to meet with help and sympathy in that quarter. Mrs. Ellersley not only approved, on condition only that Helena should not give up for it any of her out-door exercise; but she furnished her with a pair of large knitting-needles to begin with, and some gray wool, and began forthwith to instruct Helena in the complicated pattern.

We may as well say in this place, that Helena, in due time, completed the shawl, and that without interfering with any of her other duties; and when it was finished, her guardian took her himself to the Hill Farm, where she presented it to Mrs. Bray, and at the same time a handsome book to Janet. Both presents were received with great pleasure; but perhaps still greater joy was given to these kind and simple-hearted people, from seeing how well and happy the young lady looked, and still more, by her gentle but warm assurance that as long as she lived she should never forget their kindness to her.

But we must go back to the day of the concert. Everything went smoothly, as we have said, until late in the afternoon, when Edith was indulging in some

of her raptures about the concert when she was alone with Marian, and to her surprise the latter only answered gloomily,—

“It is no matter to me, I shall probably not have to go.”

“Oh, Marian!” cried Edith, quite aghast at the idea; “what for?”

“Oh! Helena is at the bottom of it, of course,” she replied, and would say no more.

“I am sure, Marian,” said Edith, “that Helena wants to be friends with you. You know she gave up her place to you directly, when you said that the sun made your head ache, this morning.”

“It is only just to get in with Bertha,” said Marian ill-naturedly.

This was a depth of cunning that Edith could not enter into; she concluded, therefore, that Marian was cross. But to be sure that there was no fear of her being kept away from the concert, she asked Helena about it when they went up stairs to dress. Helena listened to what Edith said in great surprise, but did not wait to reply. In a moment she had rushed out of the room, and nearly pushing over Bessie in her haste, who was coming in with some hot water, she flew along the gallery to Bertha's room.

“You should have knocked, my dear,” said Bertha with a smile, when she saw Helena beside her; but perceiving a blank spread itself over Helena's expressive countenance, she added quickly, “do not think, however, that I am not glad to see you—what is it?”

“Are you going to make Marian stay at home on

my account?" said Helena. "Oh, pray do not; she will never love me then!"

"My dear child," said Bertha, affectionately, "I had thought of it, but I abandoned the idea, in the hope that indulgence might do her the most good; so now go back and dress; you need not disturb yourself about it."

"Thank you," said Helena; and, much relieved, she went to prepare for the concert.

Mrs. Ellersley had been proof against all their persuasions, and had quite declined going with them. She did not feel strong enough, she said; and Helena was pained to think how much she might have helped to increase Mrs. Ellersley's delicacy of health.

"I shall have the children down to amuse me, after you are all gone," said Mrs. Ellersley; "and I will send my ticket to poor Miss Nash. She dotes upon music, but is rarely able to afford herself the pleasure of hearing a good concert. I will inclose it to her in a note by Jenkins, and I will say that you will call for her."

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried Edith, as she heard these arrangements being made; "it is next to having you, mamma; she is such a nice, dear old creature. You will laugh, Helena, she talks always without stopping."

Helena laughed now, and so did all the rest; because they said that Edith was describing herself, instead of Miss Nash; but Mrs. Ellersley, in the evening, just before they set off, said,—

"I hope, my dears, that you will all be very polite and attentive to Miss Nash. She may be a little

peculiar in her manner, but she is one of the kindest-hearted of beings, and a very old friend of your papa's and mine."

All this made Helena a little anxious to see the lady who was to accompany them, and she looked out eagerly when, after a pleasant starlight drive, the carriage stopped at the entrance of the town, before the modest dwelling of the gentle spinster. Almost before the carriage had drawn up, in 'hood and cloak Miss Nash appeared, followed by a little maid, who held a candle, and guarded the flame zealously with her hand, whilst Captain Ellersley helped her mistress into the carriage.

"Thank you, Captain Ellersley; I am sure it is so kind of you," began the little lady as she crossed the pavement. "But are you not coming inside too?" she continued in alarm as the door was shut upon her. "Now, Captain Ellersley, I beg that you will not go outside upon my account. Oh, it is too late," as the carriage drove off. "Well, I am sure no one ever had such kind friends, as I say to my little maid, Rachel; I hope that you will have as many friends, if you live to be my age. Bertha, my dear, how are you; and Miss Marian, and my little pet, Edith? Thank you, not in the least crushed,—I never care which way I sit in a carriage; not, indeed, that I am often in one though. I am sure nothing can be kinder than Mrs. Ellersley. Oh, that flower-show last year! I shall never forget it. And that reminds me that Madame D—— is lodging next door to me. It has been so nice for me; and there I have been hearing roulades and trills all the afternoon. And

here Miss Nash gave a feeble imitation of the *prima donna's* cadenzas, which made Edith at once burst into a merry laugh.

"Ah, Miss Edith," said the amiable little lady, joining in the laugh, "you think that I am a silly old thing, to be trying to imitate a beautiful concert-singer; but you see I have all her sweet notes in my ear, and I fancy that I can bring them out until I try. No, not rude, Bertha, my dear; Edith never meant to be impolite to me; I thought I should make her laugh; laughing is a good thing for young people, it always makes me glad to hear them."

By this time they had nearly reached the music-hall; but they had to move very slowly, because there were so many carriages in the narrow street. The glare of the lamps, the calling out of the coachmen to each other, and the loud tones of the policemen stationed to keep order, as well as the expectation of what was coming, kept the children in a state of excitement until they stopped before the entrance to the hall.

The blaze of light as they entered the concert-room dazzled their eyes; and Helena clung to the protecting hand of Bertha, as they passed row after row of gaily dressed people, until they reached the seats that had been taken for their party.

"So comfortable, I am sure," said Miss Nash, seating herself next to Marian; "your papa thinks of everything, my dear; and there is Master Ernest, I declare." Sure enough, there was Ernest, making his way up to them, only regretting that he had not arrived in time to escort them through the room.

This was a great addition to their pleasure ; but everything was forgotten, when a side door opened at the end of the room, and four of the performers appeared on the platform, and sang an Italian quartett. It was very charming, but this was not the best ; an expectant silence followed the applause, until the side door opened again.

This time a gentleman with a roll of music in his hand led the way, then handed on to the platform, a lady dressed splendidly in blue brocade, with a coronet of pearls round her majestic brow. She bowed to the audience, and a murmur of greeting rose directly, for this was Madame D——, the *prima donna*. She bowed again ; and the gentleman, sitting down to the piano, threw his long white hands up and down in a brilliant prelude, and prepared to accompany her song.

With the first notes, Helena's attention was fixed. The rich full tones of the Italian melody pierced her heart, and she entered into the apparent anxiety and distress of the singer. But in a moment the character of the music altered. The singer had seen something in the distance that had given her hope, and breaking out into a lively air, her sweet brilliant voice rang through the room in roulades, shakes, and cadences, until, with a final cry of "Lo vedi," she gave a yet more joyful cadence, and then ceased.

Helena breathed quickly : she had not thought singing could have been so beautiful. She was in a dream of enjoyment, and every remark jarred upon her feelings.

"Exquisite !" exclaimed Miss Nash ; "almost equal to Malibran. Her shake is nearly perfect." But that

was nothing in annoyance to the rather loud observations of some young ladies just before them.

"Julia, do you see her dress? that brocade must have cost fifty pounds!"

"Yes," replied the other, "but these kind of people make an immense deal of money. She is a fine singer, though, isn't she?"

Helena turned a look that asked for sympathy, on Bertha, who sat next to her.

"You liked that song, my love," said Bertha.

"Yes," sighed Helena; "but those people, did you hear them?" and she made a gesture of disgust.

"You need not listen to them," said Bertha, smiling. "People have different ways of expressing their enjoyment."

"I wish she would sing again," said Helena; but she was disappointed: the next time it was a trio. That was very nice, however; the parts harmonized so sweetly, going up and down together, swelling, piano and forte, like one voice. They enjoyed it, and the bass man's song too, which followed; and the pianoforte man's solo, in which he treated the instrument in a free and easy manner that astonished our beginners, although "I like your playing better," whispered Edith to her cousin. "It is not so clattering." At last came the *prima donna* again. This time she sang a touching ballad; and once more her voice thrilled through Helena's music-loving heart.

More pieces followed, more songs, more piano playing, all were delightful; and "God save the Queen" came only too soon, to put an end to the enjoyment.

Now was the time for greetings and recognitions amongst the audience. Mrs. Cheveleigh was there, and soon made her way up to Bertha. When she saw the children, she was reminded of her party now long past, and she said,—

“Ah, my dear, naughty Bertha, I am sure it was your fault that none of these young ones were present at my boy’s birthday *fête*. But I will tell you what I am going to do. I shall give a splendid party at Christmas, and I shall make you come and stay with me; then I will send for the whole of Oakridge, and you will not be able to prevent their coming. I think I shall go now, and make Captain Ellersley promise that they shall come, for Christmas will soon be here.”

Meanwhile, Marian was accosted by a young lady, who had sat near them all the evening, and who was now, for the first time, found out to be Sophia Allison, the daughter of a neighbouring gentleman, who had been a great friend of Marian’s in their childish days. She had now the dress and manners of a woman, she had been in France for the last two years, and had come home quite a Parisienne.

“Do you like Madame D——?” she asked in an indifferent manner; “she sings nicely, does she not?” Helena could have stamped with impatience. Marian only listened with surprise.

“Ah, you should have heard Mademoiselle J—— at the *Conservatoire*, and indeed my singing-mistress, Rubina, was considered to be one of the finest sopranos in Paris.”

“Indeed,” said Marian, overpowered by her old

friend's consequential manner; "but are you not glad to come home again, after having been so long away?"

"Ah, yes," said the young lady, with a sentimental air, "of course I was charmed to return to papa and mamma; but Paris was so delightful: however, I brought a French maid with me, and I have made my room look as Parisian as possible. Will you come and see me? I am horridly dull sometimes."

"Thank you," said Marian, to this flattering invitation, "I will ask mamma."

The conversation was stopped by Ernest's coming back to say that their carriage was waiting; and they were hurried away at once.

As long as Miss Nash remained with them, she led the conversation; but when they had received her message of thanks to Mrs. Ellersley, and had left her at her own door, the children were able, in their different ways, to express the delight that they had had, and the time passed quickly.

But when they had got about half-way home, and Edith was in the midst of "Oh! Bertha, did you see that funny bass man make all the others laugh," a loud crack was heard, and the carriage received such a jerk that she stopped, and, in a fright, exclaimed, "Oh! papa, the horses are running away!"

"If they are, my dear, Edward will soon stop them," said her father quietly. He had a great objection to the timidity that some ladies show when horses are restive, and had impressed upon the children that it was both silly and dangerous to express their fears; so Edith said no more, but she did not finish her story;

and when the galloping of the horses' feet upon the hard road was heard, and the carriage swayed from side to side, her heart went pit-a-pat, and she longed to ask her papa if he was frightened. Marian did not move; and Helena only put her hand in Bertha's, and then remained quite still.

Suddenly Captain Ellersley muttered half to himself, "The river!" and, sliding back the front window, spoke in a commanding tone to the coachman.

"Turn them up Maze-hill. To the left."

"I'll do my best, captain," said the old coachman, between his teeth, "but the gray is almost master just now."

Bertha, too, had been thinking about the river. They were approaching a place where the road sloped downwards for some distance, then turned towards the river, and ran above it for a hundred yards, with no protection but a slight and broken-down hand-rail. A plunge of the restive horses there, and what might be the result? Bertha could only wait, and be thankful that her aunt was not with them; when the thought of what she might have to hear crossed her mind, and she gave a shudder as she thought of the narrow road and the steep and broken bank. But it was only for a few minutes that her heart failed her: she soon remembered in whose hand lay the safety of herself and her dear ones, and she became composed.

She had concluded that the children were scarcely aware of the danger, until she heard a startling low cry from Marian. It sounded like the result of pent-up fright and misery.

"Oh! papa," she said, "can you forgive me, if

we are thrown into the river? It was all my doing, the paper and the gum; and I wanted Helena to have the blame. Oh, papa, Helena, won't you all say that you forgive me?"

"Hush, my child," said her papa, in a serious voice, his eyes were fixed upon the foaming horses, for this was the critical moment.

With strength and dexterity, the old coachman took advantage of a slight slackening of speed, and guiding them to the opposite side of the road, he gave them a good sweep and turned them safely into another road, let them have a run up the steep hill, and, by the time they had reached the top, was able to bring them to gently, and then to stop them altogether.

"It's all right now, sir," he said respectfully, turning round.

"Yes," replied his master, "you managed that corner well, Edwards."

"I wasn't easy about it, I'm sure, sir," said the coachman. "I am sorry that it has happened; but it was them boys at the cottages, sir, letting off squibs; and no horse of any spirit could stand that. Shall I drive round by Lane House, sir?"

"You had better do so," said his master; and they set off again at their usual pace.

"It is those mischievous lads of Walker's, I have no doubt," remarked Captain Ellersley, as he sat down again. "I shall send a policeman to them immediately. It is high time such tricks were stopped."

"They ought to be, indeed," said Bertha; and no more was said until they arrived at Oakridge, for they were all occupied with their own thoughts.

Marian, who was still weeping silently, though relieved by her confession, was uncertain whether, in the confusion, it had been heard by any one but Helena, who had gently pressed her hand with a ready forgiveness and sympathy that had softened Marian's heart towards her for ever.

As they passed through the gate, and drove up to the house, Captain Ellersley said, "You must all be careful; do not rush in to your mother with this story: she will be alarmed enough when she does hear it, and it must not be told her all at once."

None of them felt in a humour to rush up to their mamma, although they were delighted to see her again, and it seemed a month since they had left her; but they went quietly into the room, and it was not with her usual liveliness that Edith stole up to have the first kiss.

"How cold you are, dear child," said Mrs. Ellersley; "pray ring, that supper may come up directly; I am glad that I ordered some hot negus. That is right, Bertha, make a blaze. Let Bessy take your shawls, and then come and tell me all about the concert."

There would have been no greater pleasure at another time, than to have clustered round their mother, and have recounted all their pleasures; but their talking powers seemed stunned to-night. Edith, ever the most ready, had begun to deliver Miss Nash's messages, and Helena tried to second her, but they were glad to be interrupted by the entrance of the supper, which was in itself to be the conclusion of the treat.

But to Marian, at least, roast pheasant offered no temptation; and after trying in vain to taste what was upon her plate, with the tears choking her all the time, she at last whispered to Bertha, "May I not go away?"

"Wait until supper is over," said Bertha, in reply, "and command yourself."

But her father had overheard the whisper, and all at once broke out with—

"I do not wonder that you want to hide yourself, Marian; you may go, certainly, but first apologize to Helena for having, even in thought, tried to lay the blame of your fault on her."

"Oh, please do not say anything about that, sir," said Helena; when she saw the stern expression come over her guardian's face that had decreed her going to school, she felt sincerely sorry for Marian.

Mrs. Ellersley listened in wonder.

"What is it, Arthur?" she inquired. "Why do you all look so pale and strange? What has happened?"

"You remember that accident in my study, yesterday; it was Marian who did it. She knew I should not be angry, but she was base enough to conceal it, in the hope of throwing the blame on Helena."

"I am very sorry, papa," sobbed Marian, "and I beg Helena's pardon; but, indeed, I meant to tell you the truth to-night."

"Yes, after you had secured your pleasure. I understand all, and it makes me doubly ashamed of my daughter."

"She has suffered much already," said Bertha, in a low tone to her uncle.

"Perhaps you are right, Bertha," replied Captain Ellersley, softening his tone a little. "You may go now, Marian; we had none of us need be angry with each other to-night."

Marian went to bid her mamma "good night," and received a kiss from her, that had much of sad reproach even in its tenderness; then timidly stood beside her father, and said, "Will you forgive me, papa?"

"I forgive you, Marian, as I thank God for sparing us in great danger," said her father in a low tone; and she received his kiss, and left the room.

"My dear Arthur," said Mrs. Ellersley, as soon as the door had closed behind her daughter, "something still has happened that I do not know."

"Those mischievous lads at the cottages," began Captain Ellersley, in as indifferent a manner as he could assume, "were letting off squibs again to-night. That reminds me,—Edith, ring the bell. I must send a message to Smith, the policeman. One of the squibs startled the horses, and they set off quickly down the slope."

Mrs. Ellersley gave an exclamation of fear, and inquired anxiously, "Were they soon stopped?"

"Edwards managed them admirably," continued Captain Ellersley. "You may safely trust him in future. He never lost his temper or control. I watched him closely."

"Did they set off at the cottages?" said Mrs. Ellersley. "Then you must have come near the river."

"That was it, mamma," exclaimed Edith, who had with difficulty been remaining silent.

"Edwards turned them round the corner," continued Captain Ellersley quietly, "and made them keep their pace up the hill. They were quiet enough when they reached the top."

"You came home, then, by Lane House; I am glad of that," said Mrs. Ellersley. "I have often wished that Edwards would not drive past the river, even in summer."

"You see, aunt," said Bertha, with a playfulness that veiled her earnest meaning, "we were very thankful to return to you safe and sound to-night."

"I am thankful indeed," said Mrs. Ellersley, as, with moistened eyes, she looked round upon her dear ones, and gave a sigh to the absent Marian.

"And we none of us screamed, mamma," said Edith; "none of us spoke, except when Marian ——" but she stopped short, for Bertha shook her head, and she saw that her papa was looking very grave.

By this time the policeman had been brought, and the servant came to say that he was waiting further orders: so Captain Ellersley went out to speak to him; and the supper, which had been so little of a feast, was taken away. The rest then gathered round the fire, for they had much yet to talk about, and their tongues once loosened, it was wonderful how much they had to tell; and Mrs. Ellersley had shuddered over their narrow escape, and had shed tears over poor Marian's late repentance, and had begun to be much amused by their lively account of the concert by the time that Captain Ellersley returned.

He soon joined the circle; and, rejoicing to see his wife look cheerful again, he sat down to help them in

discussing the beauties of the music they had heard; and amused himself by teasing Helena a little by criticisms upon the favourite Madame D——, about whom she was speaking in such quaint terms of rapture. But she took all in good part, and they were all very comfortable until Bertha took out her watch, and exclaimed that it was nearly midnight.

"I thought it must be shockingly late," said Mrs. Ellersley. "Pray, my dears, go to bed. Helena will be very pale to-morrow morning."

They bid good night directly, and were leaving the room, when Bertha said—

"Do not talk when you get up stairs; go at once to bed, and do not disturb Marian. You hear me, Helena," she added, after the clear voice of Edith had answered readily—"Yes, Bertha."

Helena turned round and said, hesitatingly—

"If Marian is awake, may I ——"

"Oh yes," said Bertha; "bid her good night, if you like, but do not stay to chatter. You understand—now run away."

"Helena is wonderfully improved," said Captain Ellersley, when the door had closed. "I could scarcely have believed it possible in so short a time. Do you really feel, Bertha, as if you could manage her?"

"Perfectly," said Bertha; a gleam of hope for Helena darting through her suddenly. "I have begun to love her dearly. She obeys me heartily, and she is even grateful when I tell her of her faults. She has a sincerity and earnestness of feeling which only need guiding aright, to make her a fine character."

"My ward has certainly won upon me strangely," said Captain Ellersley. "I shall miss her from amongst the children."

"Then why send her away, dear uncle?" said Bertha quickly.

"If Bertha is willing to teach her, Arthur, you surely will not refuse to let her stay with us," continued Mrs. Ellersley. "I shall feel as if I were parting with one of my own girls, I know."

"Nay; it is not fair for both of you to attack me," said Captain Ellersley, playfully; then added more seriously, "If I were sure that it would be the best for her. She and Marian do not seem to get on together; and if Marian is unkind to her, she would be better away."

"Marian has been very naughty indeed," said Bertha; "but I think this is the climax of it. I do not despair of seeing them reconciled and becoming good friends; then their different dispositions will act upon each other to their mutual benefit. I know that she might have greater advantages at school, in some respects; but I think that it is the love and tenderness of home that Helena requires to bring out her virtues."

"And I am sure Bertha is strict enough," said Mrs. Ellersley.

"To compensate even for your indulgence," said her husband, laughing. "Well, my dear, if you wish it, and Bertha thinks it will be best, I suppose that I may burn Mrs. Brown's circular after I have spoken to Marian about it, and let the child stay at home."

"Oh, thank you, dear uncle!" cried Bertha,

starting up, and pressing one of her uncle's hands ; "then do let me tell her to-night. You do not know what a weight it has been upon her. I hear them just coming out of the school-room, where they have been arranging some things for morning. I will run at once and stop them."

"Bertha is like a child herself," said Captain Ellersley, smiling as he watched the eagerness with which she flew upon her errand. "I had no idea that she had taken this so much to heart."

In two minutes Bertha returned, leading Helena by the hand. She looked half-frightened, and had a good deal of her old stiff defiance, as she raised her eyes inquiringly to her guardian.

"I thought that you had better tell her yourself," said Bertha.

"It is nothing alarming," said Captain Ellersley, giving Helena a re-assuring smile. "It is only—do you wish to go to school?"

"No, sir;" answered Helena deliberately and earnestly.

"And you do not want to leave us? you could be happy here?" continued Captain Ellersley.

"I would never leave you, if I might choose;" said Helena, in a gentle but earnest tone; all her defiance was gone.

"Then you shall not," said Captain Ellersley, taking hold of her hand. "I have been very much pleased with your improvement lately, and I do not think any longer that we cannot manage you. Besides, neither Mrs. Ellersley nor Bertha seems inclined to let you go; so if you will promise to be a docile child to

them, you shall never leave us until you desire it yourself."

The revulsion of feeling on this night of excitement was more than Helena could calmly bear, she turned first pale, then red, then tried to thank her guardian; but it was no use, so she leaned her head on Mrs. Ellersley's shoulder, and feeling her kind arm at once put round her, she gave one or two of her deep sobs, and burst into tears.

The thanks were given by Edith, who jumped about, and clapped her hands, and cried, "Oh, thank you, thank you, dear papa. That is just how Ernest said it ought to be; and baby will be so delighted—when she is old enough to know, I mean; and then Marian and Helena will have time to grow into friends, for Helena says she thinks that Marian is going to love her now; and everything will be so nice, won't it, mamma?"

"Not if we tire mamma to death in this way," said Bertha. "Come, Helena, I am going to be very despotic now. Say, thank you, and come along with me."

Helena started up, pushed back her hair from her face, and looking up gratefully, tried to obey; but she was not very eloquent. Captain Ellersley, however, said quickly,—

"I need no thanks, my dear, I am very glad to keep you amongst us; only be a good girl, as your poor father would have liked to see you, and make yourself happy,—that is all I desire. God bless you!"

And with a lightened, grateful heart, Helena went away.

CHAPTER XVI.

HELENA's happiness seemed complete, when she found that Marian at last was ready to press the hand of reconciliation. Marian had received a severe lesson, and it was long before she forgot it. Brought up in her father's horror of a lie, she had never been untruthful before ; and now that continued little acts of disobedience, and indulged feelings of jealousy, had led her to this sin, she despised herself, and her eyes were opened to the wickedness of her former conduct.

As regarded Helena, it seemed as if she could not make amends enough to her : she no longer grudged her the place of an elder sister, but was willing to look up to her ; and, a responsibility thus forced upon Helena, she became, as Bertha wished to see her, anxious to lay aside all selfishness, and desirous to help every one, and to be an example to her younger companions.

It must not be supposed that this was accomplished in a day or in a week ; slowly, but surely, the work went on. Many and frequent were the hinderances at first ; for the seeds of evil were always ready to spring up, if watered by the petty jealousies of Marian or by Helena's self-will and morbid tendencies. But greater than the evil in them was the good : they had begun to know and act upon the solemn truth,

that, as the children of God, they were bound to serve Him; that, as members of Christ, they must ever follow Him; and thus it was that, from being a band of untrained and wilful spirits, they were all learning to live as became those who had been made the heirs of Heaven.

And thus we must leave them for three years or more, and return to Oakridge on a sunny morning in the early spring. Let us pass through the garden first. The shrubs are higher, but otherwise there is not much change in it; the lawn is shaven smooth, and the beds are bordered with the earliest flowers. Stooping over these, we see a tall, elegant girl, plainly dressed in brown merino, for the weather is still cold, but whose pretty collar and cuffs, and gay pink bow, relieve the dark dress, and make you think it is a festal day. Her dark hair is smoothly rolled into a coil behind, but her face is hidden by the hat she wears; and as she gathers violets and primroses, and other bright little flowers, you wonder who it is, until a voice cries,—“ Helena! Helena! Mamma has come down stairs, and breakfast is ready; do come.” Then she raises her head, and smiles, and we see her large brown eyes, and we know that it is our old friend, Helena.

The voice that called her was from the open library window, where Edith stood—it must be Edith, although so much taller: there were the same laughing face and long fair curls.

“ Is Marian there yet ? ” said Helena, coming up to the window, and displaying her treasures. “ Look, Marian; could you have believed that our garden

would have produced such a bouquet on the 20th of March."

"It is lovely, Helena," replied Marian, appearing at the window. "You would think me very lazy, not to come and help you; but I thought I would not break through my before-breakfast practising, even on mamma's birthday."

"You good, steady creature!" said Helena, affectionately. "I thought I saw Bertha frowning at me from her bedroom window; I must go and be scolded for coming out in the cold," and Helena, with the glow of health upon her cheek and the smile of content upon her lips, passed quickly through the porch-door, and, meeting the others in the hall, went with them into the breakfast-room.

There was Captain Ellersley, not a day older, as nurse, who was always reflective on a birthday, had just declared; and the gentle mother, receiving with quiet pleasure the congratulations of the young ones as they entered; and Bertha, handsome as ever, none the worse for the labours of the last three years. Willie was not there; he had gone to school at last, and was always at the top of his class, and was rapidly getting the mischief thrashed out of him, according to his manly brother Ernest. Willie's place was supplied in a quiet way by Percy; and at the table, in a high chair, breakfasting in the room in honour of the birthday, was the quondam baby, who had for some time been pushed out of her honours by a little brother, and was now Constance—or Consie, more frequently—and knew all her letters, thanks to her almost second mother, Helena.

Ernest and Willie were coming, as fortunately it had happened that mamma's birthday this year was on a Saturday, and the baby would be brought in presently; but there was one that could not come. The fair, gentle little Louy was an angel now, as Consie used to fold her hands and say, when any one asked her about her brothers and sisters. She had faded away two years ago, of some lingering but painless disorder; and though Mrs. Ellersley sighed sometimes at the broken circle, she could smile when Consie said, "Louy is an angel now, mamma."

One thing was not changed at Oakridge—the post-bag came in at breakfast-time, just as it used to do; and this morning it was heavier than usual. The newspaper, of course, and a certain number of large blue letters for the captain; but others were not forgotten to-day. Mrs. Ellersley had several birthday letters; there was a whimsical epistle for Bertha from her old friend Mrs. Cheveleigh, now in Devonshire, with her husband, and who was allowing sorrow to bring out the good points in her character, and fast becoming the comfort as well as the joy of her invalid husband's life. And there was a letter for Miss Ellersley—a note we ought to say. It was written upon lemon-coloured paper, and directed in a small French hand.

"An invitation from Sophia Allison!" exclaimed Marian, when she had looked at it. "Her dearest love to you, Helena, and she hopes that mamma will allow us both to go, on the 30th, to a *soirée musicale* at Egton. But, Helena, what are you dreaming about? A *soirée musicale*! does not that wake you

up, my dear? Mamma, Sophy says it is to be considered quite a semi-juvenile affair, so that, although we are not introduced, she hopes that you will have no objection to our joining the party;" and Marian, after she had thus delivered all the important matter of the despatch, handed it over to her mother.

"Papa is dreaming, too, I think," said Edith, laughing. "Papa, you have put salt into your coffee."

"Have I, my dear," said her father, as if he scarcely knew what she had charged him with. "Dreaming, my dear, did you say?"

"Yes, both you and Helena, papa," returned Edith. "I think Helena got up too soon."

"I think it is a bad plan, to allow letters to be looked into at breakfast, Edie," said her father; "they give one unpleasant dreams sometimes."

Helena threw one of her old deep quick glances across the table; the same brightness there was in them as formerly, but now it was softened by affection and respect, as she said with strong feeling,—

"I wish it was a dream."

"Well, my dear, do not let us discuss it now," said Captain Ellersley, as if laying aside an unpleasant subject; but his wife would not be satisfied; Helena had had bad news, she was sure; and everybody looked so anxious, that it was evidently no use trying to postpone the explanation.

"Sir John Bertram has returned to England," said Captain Ellersley, trying to speak cheerfully. "He and Lady Bertram are in London. He writes in the kindest manner to me; but Lady Bertram is still in

very delicate health, and they are anxious to have Helena as soon as possible."

"My dear love, how shall we part with you," said Mrs. Ellersley, laying her hand affectionately on that of Helena, who sat beside her.

Bertha looked as if she could not speak. It was a great blow to her. Helena was now like a dear and valued sister.

Marian cried, "Oh, papa, she cannot go soon."

Edith said, "She shan't go."

And whilst Percy listened eagerly, little Consie had climbed down from her chair, and had crept round to Helena's side, and raising her solemn wondering eyes, she said,—

"You not leave me, Nella."

This was too much for Helena's forced calmness. She got up hastily, and in a low voice said to Mrs. Ellersley,—

"I ought to have expected this, but I was so happy, Madre, dear;" and kissing her quietly, left the room.

Then arose loud lamentations. As Helena had said, they ought to have expected it; for several letters lately had spoken of the probable return of Sir John Bertram, and his invalid wife, for whom a more bracing air was now recommended. And they had sometimes talked about the possibility of her having then to leave them; but now the certainty seemed quite to break upon them as if they had never thought of it before, and not one of them but felt it painfully.

Captain Ellersley tried to reason with the grief that Marian in particular showed, but it was a hard

task, when he himself loved Helena so much; and as for Bertha, she was at first of little use in comforting the children.

Mrs. Ellersley had very soon taken up her bouquet with a sigh, and had gone in search of Helena. She met her on the staircase, coming down again, with the traces of grief about her, it is true, but with a sweetness of expression that was most touching.

"I went away so quickly, Madre, dear," she said, using again a little term of endearment, that had become common with her, "that I have told you nothing yet. Will you let me fetch you your warm shawl and your bonnet, and then we can take a turn along the south walk. You will not feel the cold there, I am sure."

And to the surprise of the forlorn party in the breakfast-room, Edith descried her mamma and Helena walking under the south garden wall, apparently as comfortably as on any other sunny morning. Helena with the open letter in her hand, to which she every now and then referred; and Mrs. Ellersley leaning affectionately upon her arm.

No one ventured to disturb them; and it was a relief when Ernest and Willie arrived, and their rather violent expressions of dismay at the unexpected news, gave an outlet to the feelings of the rest. Certainly, if Sir John Bertram wished for a warm welcome on his return to England, it was clear that he must not seek it amongst the young people at Oakridge.

"Such a miserable birthday as it has made," said Willie; but when Helena came in, she would not

hear of the birthday being made a miserable one on her account.

"It is very kind of you all," she said; "but I think, as it is the last *fête* we shall have all together for some time, we ought to try and enjoy it: should we not, Bertha?"

"Certainly," said Bertha, smiling, in spite of herself, at the philosophy of the eyes that were so full of tears all the time, that it was only strange they did not overflow. So the arrangements proceeded as if nothing had occurred; the walk to Bathurst, all together, with the donkey carriage, just as it was three years ago, only that it was filled with another set of babies, and that Peggy had been informed of their coming this time, and there was no need for them to break open the dairy door, for the front entrance opened wide for them; and the hall was swept out, and adorned with evergreens, and a table spread with fruits and sweetmeats, to surprise every one who had not been in the secret.

And after luncheon, the table was cleared away, and the little ones played about and listened to the echo of their own young voices, as their merry laugh rang through the hall; and Bertha stayed to listen, whilst her aunt, sitting in one of the massive faded chairs of the large dining-room, by turns expressed her thankful gladness in the well-doing of all her children, from Ernest, the first-born, who had never yet given them an hour's pain, down to the little ones, so fair and blooming, in full health and energy; and then her sorrow at the prospect of losing one who was almost as dear to her as they were.

And meanwhile, Helena, and the two girls, and Ernest, were going into every room of the deserted house, with a restless desire to keep moving about, and with many a joke and laugh, that hid the trouble they were all trying to put off. They even mounted to the roof, from which there was a view for miles around; and Helena traced, through the clear atmosphere, many a land-mark well known to her, and gazed on them for a few minutes with an earnestness that seemed to imprint them upon her memory.

"When my ship comes from the East-Indies, laden with its priceless treasures," said Ernest. "I shall buy Bathurst, and invite you all to stay with me."

"Thank you," said the young ladies with due politeness; "we shall accept your invitation, certainly."

"But first imagine Bathurst once more civilized," continued Ernest. "The best shooting in the country, a fishing-pond and trout-stream, what might be a superb bowling-green, and stables for an Arabian stud."

"And what a garden the rosy wilderness might be," said Helena. "Should we cut the peacocks down, Marian?"

"Oh, you barbarian," exclaimed Ernest; "I would have none of the ancient emblems touched. There is a moral lesson in the peacocks of yew. Pride brings pain. Excellent! I shall go and tell Bertha. That is too good to keep."

And amidst the scoffing laughs of his companions, Ernest with gallantry helped them down the step-ladder by which they had ascended to the roof, and then, followed by Edith, ran down stairs; whilst

Helena and Marian, following at a more dignified pace, at last found themselves in the now unshuttered drawing-room, able to gaze their fill upon the lovely St. John, still the object of their wonder and delight.

"I shall never forget it, Marian, wherever I may be," said Helena.

"And I shall never come to look at it without thinking of you," answered Marian. "Then the St. John will be a bond between us," said Helena. "It was the first really beautiful picture that I ever saw, and you were the first to show it to me, Marian. We have gone through many squalls together since then, and we have often been very naughty girls, Marian; but it was here, with you, that I first felt within me that love of the good and beautiful which is a part of our higher nature, as Bertha says. I almost forget the painting now, as I look at it, and I think of the faith, and love, and gentleness of which it reminds us. Better than pictures, they are, are they not? and good for every-day use, as well as holidays. Still I shall envy you, Marian, whenever I think of your coming to have a little dream in the drawing-room at Bathurst." "And I shall always dream of you, I know," said Marian.

"No, not of me alone," said Helena, with a grave look at the picture—"but I shall be glad to think you do not forget me."

As the idea of being without Helena was put thus vividly before her, Marian quite gave way; and there is no knowing how far they might have gone, had not Ernest happily interrupted them, by opening the door suddenly, with the exclamation,—

"Just as I thought, Helena and Marian in each other's arms, doing the sentimental!"

"We are very silly, I allow," said Helena, coming forward, with a smile, to Bertha, who was behind; "but, to make us cheerful to-day, I think Bathurst was a bad place to bring us to, for it seems to contain nearly all the land-marks of our recollections."

"Come away from it, then," said Bertha, with an answering smile. "My aunt has invited old Peggy, who will be proud to come; the children have already set off, and we are all impatient to go home."

About old Peggy, Bertha referred to one of the entertainments of the day, which was to have a number of poor widows—Mrs. Ellersley's especial care—to tea, in the large airy nursery, from which the children were, for this evening, banished. It had been decorated by the young ladies for the occasion; and there they went with their mamma, to receive the poor women, who came to tea at four o'clock precisely.

Marian presided, and the rest waited upon the guests, who enjoyed themselves heartily, the only drawback to their pleasure being the news that had soon spread through the household, that Miss Bertram was going away. The oldest widow made a speech, for the purpose of thanking Mrs. Ellersley for all her kindness to them, and wishing her long life and happiness in the name of them all; and at the close of it she begged to be allowed the liberty of saying how sorry they were that the sweet young lady was going away, that would be so much missed by every one, and she could only say that, go among grand folks or

where she would, she hoped that Miss Bertram might find as many true friends as she would leave behind her.

And when Miss Bertram said, "I thank you, Bridget, and all of you. I wish I was not going; but I shall never forget any of you, nor the children at the school either, wherever I may be;" then Mrs. Nurse took off her spectacles, and wiped her eyes, and a murmur of sympathy rose, in the midst of which Mrs. Ellersley wished them all good-night, and the rest followed her example, and went to the drawing-room, where Ernest amused his father by a humorous account of Helena's maiden speech, as he called it, which, in its simple eloquence, had drawn tears from nurse and applause from everybody.

There was no lack of response to Ernest's teasing, for every one felt as if they must make the most of the day they had devoted to festivity; and, to the extreme delight of the little ones, who were allowed to sit up to witness it, it was concluded by a grand exhibition of fireworks on the lawn, under the superintendence of the old coachman and Mr. Ernest, assisted by the meddling fingers of Master Willie. Nothing failed, except a Catherine-wheel, which was pinned to a tree, and refused to turn round; but the *chef-d'œuvre* of the evening, manufactured carefully in the town under Ernest's own superintendence, was a double E, entwined tastefully, burning in red flame, and sending up a rocket, to finish with, and this succeeded admirably.

Mrs. Ellersley could have dispensed with an exhibition which she considered a little dangerous; but as

Ernest's homage, it was grateful to her; and very glad that it was over, and without accident, she welcomed him back out of the cold night air with warm thanks.

It was not until Monday that anything was settled about Helena's departure, but then it was very quickly done.

"When would you like to go, my dear," Captain Ellersley asked of Helena, who had just come in from bidding the boys good-bye, and was not looking very cheerful upon the occasion.

"When must I go?" said Helena. She did not suppose that her guardian thought she would *like* to go at any time.

"You know what your uncle says, that he should be glad to receive you as soon as possible, since your aunt's health makes a young companion desirable, and they are naturally anxious to see you," said Captain Ellersley.

"Then I will go any day that you fix," said Helena. "Perhaps it will be better not to have too long to think about it. But, sir," she said, returning to her old mode of addressing her guardian, "may I not come back sometimes? It will be very hard to bear, if I am not sure of seeing them often."

"I intend to arrange for that," said Captain Ellersley. "We could not bear to lose sight of you altogether. I shall bargain with Sir John for two months every year, if possible."

"My holidays," said Helena, half aloud, but checked herself. She was going to her own uncle, as Bertha had reminded her; and he had always written very kindly to her, and the costly presents she had received

from him, and the good supply of pocket-money that he had begged Captain Ellersley to allow her, called for her gratitude.

"Of course, I intended to go with you," continued Captain Ellersley; "and now, this morning, I have received news which will oblige me to go to town on Thursday. My dear child," he added, seeing that Helena could scarcely stand, "I fear that I am hurrying you very much, but this is such a good opportunity, and your uncle will be pleased to see you so soon."

"Oh yes, I will go," said Helena, hurriedly. "You know I had just boasted that I thought it better to go soon. But will you give me a moment more, now when we are arranging for my leaving Oakridge, that I may try to thank you for all your kindness to me since I first came to you. I owe all my happiness to you, only I cannot bear to think of the trouble I used to give you."

"You have amply repaid us since," said Captain Ellersley; "and remember, Helena, that when by law I cease to be your guardian, I shall always be your friend. You are like a daughter to us, and here you will always find a home."

From this moment began Helena's leave-takings, and they lasted until the day of her departure. In the village, at the school, in the neighbourhood, and the house—everywhere it seemed that Helena had some dear friend, who must be seen during these short three days. To all she said, "I hope it will not be long before I come to Oakridge again." But the uncertainty made it a melancholy hope. At last all was

done, and Thursday morning had arrived. Mrs. Ellersley, Bertha, and the girls were to accompany them to the station; so there were only the little ones to part from in the house. But this was bad enough, for Consie would not be comforted; "Nella, Nella, take me with you," was her cry; and it wrung Helena's heart to have to put her into the dear old nurse's arms and tear herself away.

But she determined to bear up against it all, and not even the road to little Coverton, with all its memories, overpowered her; and the girls wondered at the quiet way in which she talked to their mamma, and kept attending to her comfort all the way. When they reached the station they had not ten minutes to wait. Captain Ellersley went to see about the tickets, and the rest sat together in the waiting-room.

"You will write to us often, Helena," said Mrs. Ellersley, tenderly. "We shall be very anxious for the post-bag now."

Helena scarcely replied, but seizing Bertha by the hand, she half dragged her out upon the platform, where, at that early hour, there was no one stirring but a poor woman, with a bundle, waiting at one end.

"Bertha," she exclaimed, in a voice of suppressed emotion, "it is no use—I cannot go. It is cruel to take me from my home—from the only friends I have—from those to whom I owe more than my life! Why were you all so kind to me? Why did you teach me, and take care of me, and now send me away? Bertha, is it not hard?"

"It is hard, dear child," said Bertha, tenderly. "It is hard to bear. I feel as if I was losing my best-

loved companion. I shall miss you every hour of the day. We shall all miss you, dear Helena ; and it is hard for you to part from us who love you so dearly, and to leave the home where you have been so cherished, to go amongst comparative strangers, to make new ties, and new habits. But it is right ! that should be enough for us all. I used to tell you to submit yourself to those who were set over you ; now I tell you to submit to the circumstances that God has ordered for you. Give up your own will and wishes, now and always ; set yourself cheerfully to find the blessings of your new position, and be doing good. There, dear child, is my last lecture to you : when you are gone, I must lecture myself."

" Ah, Bertha, what shall I become without you ?" said Helena, mournfully ; but her passionate resistance was gone, and, again quiet in appearance, she obeyed her guardian's summons, and went to say the last words to the kind friend who had been a mother to her. The words had to be few ; and, the farewell to the girls and Bertha, had to be short and hurried, for the train was waiting ; and Helena found herself almost lifted into the carriage by Captain Ellersley before she had finished the message she had wished to send to Consie. However, there was no help for it, the whistle sounded, the train moved off, and now, three years and a half after she had first intended it, Helena Bertram found herself on the way to London.

CHAPTER XVII.

It could scarcely be wondered at if Helena's spirits gave way, as the last remnant of Edith's crimson bonnet-ribbons faded from her view, and that for the first half-hour her thick veil hid her face from view. But soon her guardian's kindness made her once more try to exert herself.

"There, Bertha," she said to herself, "it is over now. I have been a naughty girl long enough, as Consie says; I will be good now;" and making the effort, she soon found that it was possible to be interested in the different kinds of country that they passed through, to admire the churches and cathedrals that they caught a glimpse of, and to be first annoyed and then amused by an eccentric fellow-traveller who joined them about half-way through their journey.

And as they drew near the end, curiosity and expectation filled her mind. Captain Ellersley had never but once seen Sir John Bertram, so that he could scarcely answer her eager inquiries as to what he was like; in fact, Helena had herself seen him more recently, but that was at least ten years ago, and all recollection of his person had passed away. Sooner than she expected, however, at the King's Cross Station, her curiosity was gratified. She was standing, almost bewildered at the noise and number of moving people, beside her guardian, when a tall foreign-looking gentleman passed near them, who was evidently

expecting to meet some passenger. Captain Ellersley, at that moment, was seeking for some book or basket in the carriage they had left, but completing his search almost immediately, he said, "Is that all, Helena?" and the gentleman turned round, and looked at them.

"Surely I am not mistaken," he said, courteously,—
"Captain Ellersley, it must be, and my niece?"

Captain Ellersley bowed, explanations followed, Helena was greeted warmly enough, and after a brief interval of confusion and arrangement about the luggage, Helena found herself quietly seated in Sir John Bertram's carriage, which had been waiting for them outside the station.

Whilst Sir John and her guardian conversed, Helena had sufficient time to recall her recollections of her uncle. The voice had at once seemed strangely familiar, in spite of the foreign intonation and gesture with which he spoke at times, but in the face, half-covered as it was with beard and moustaches, she could trace little resemblance to her father. Still he was her father's brother, and, as Bertha had said would be the case, the ties of blood drew her towards him, and the very indifference with which he treated her, mixed with a sort of good-nature as it were, showed him to be her own relation.

By the time the carriage stopped, Helena had accepted him as her uncle, and was prepared, calmly at least, to be introduced to her new home. This, at present, was only a set of furnished apartments at the West End, taken for a month or two, "Merely temporary," as Sir John remarked, when they entered, "just till we see how London agrees with Lady

Bertram. Afterwards we must find some place in the country, I suppose." They had now reached the landing of the first floor, and a foreign-looking maid, who was coming out of the drawing-room, held the door open for them to enter.

"Your mistress has come down, Marie? Then, Helena, my dear, let me introduce you to your aunt."

Following her uncle, Helena passed through the smaller half of the drawing-room, which was divided by folding-doors, one of which was opened by Marie, who announced her master. The room was very warm, and had a strong odour of perfume and flowers. In one of the windows stood a large parrot-cage, and before it a flower-stand filled with lovely hot-house roses. In the other were some flowering plants, and many pretty foreign-looking *bijoux* were strewed about the room. A fat lap-dog lay on a crimson cushion at one side of the fireplace, and at the other, upon a couch, in a black silk dress, and lace cap with cerise ribbons, and gold pins, Lady Bertram was reclining.

Beside her was a work-table, with a new book, a vinaigrette, and some embroidery upon it; but Lady Bertram was doing nothing, unless gently moving a large black fan to and fro might be called an occupation. She had been pretty, and was still fair and lady-like in her appearance, but there was an expression now upon her face as if continual ill health had made her fretful.

"Emily, here is my niece, Helena,—and allow me to introduce Captain Ellersley," said Sir John Bertram. It was wonderful how he could preserve his lively, genial manner, in such an atmosphere of sweet but

sickly languor. Lady Bertram held out her hand to Helena, and kissed her on both cheeks, then bowed to Captain Ellersley, with an apology for not rising; "as I am quite an invalid, good for nothing, as Sir John will have told you."

Lady Bertram spoke with a slight nasal utterance, as if more accustomed to speak French than English, and with a fretful intonation. "Sit down, my love," she added, pointing to a low fauteuil beside her; "we are very glad to see you, Captain Ellersley, and I am sure it was very kind of you to bring Sir John's niece directly; I have been dying to see her."

Captain Ellersley made a suitable reply, and spoke of Mrs. Ellersley's reluctance to part with her.

"I am sure that is very kind of her," said Lady Bertram. "Helena must have lived with you a long time. I had no idea that she was so tall. You told me that she was a child Sir John."

"The nice letters that she used to send us might have reminded me that time was passing," said Sir John, looking kindly at his niece; "but I assure you, Emily, that I was astonished when I saw the young lady with Captain Ellersley."

"Will you ring for Marie?" said Lady Bertram, languidly; "you must be tired to death, my love; Marie will show you to your room, and tell them to bring you some tea—it will refresh you; and have a good rest before you attempt to dress for dinner. Have you brought a maid with you?"

"No," said Helena, her heart sinking lower and lower.

"How unfortunate! I must ask Marie to wait upon

you, then. Oh! there she is. Marie, take Miss Bertram up stairs, and see that she has everything that she requires; you must really attend to Miss Bertram's toilette yourself, Marie, for I find that she has brought no maid up from the country with her."

"*Oui, madame,*" replied Marie, scanning Miss Bertram's toilette with a professor's eye; and Helena, passing her uncle and Captain Ellersley, who were examining something in the outer room, and feeling very much inclined to seize her guardian by the arm and say, "Let us go back again," followed the French maid up stairs.

The room prepared for her was large for a London house, and many luxuries had been added to it evidently by the present occupants; but a good fire, an easy chair, and a skilful maid, seemed to Helena a miserable exchange for the domestic comfort she had left behind; and she accepted Marie's offer of some tea, inquired the hour of dinner, and then, telling her to come again when it was time to dress, she gladly saw the mincing figure depart, and sat down to try and find out the blessings of her present position, or to cry over its miseries, as the case might be.

The crying came first, in spite of her efforts to avoid it; but the entrance of Marie with some tea put a stop to that. The tea proved refreshing, and the philosophy came more easily after it. "Can it be only a few hours since I left them?" said Helena to herself. "If Marian could only see me just now! What will they be doing? It is Edith's hour for practising; Marian will be preparing her German for to-morrow; Bertha will have gone to read to old

Elsie—she said she would go this afternoon; dear Madre will just have stepped into the nursery, where the little ones are having their tea; baby will be rolling upon a cushion before the fire, cooing in echo to the singing of the kettle on the hob; nurse will be watching him, and pouring out the tea, and keeping Master Percy in order, telling him that he is far more mischievous than his brother Willie ever was; and there will be my pet, my Consie, looking so fair and sweet, in her dark-blue frock, and her clean pinafore, and her golden curls, and she will be saying, ‘Mamma, when will Nella come back adain?’ Bah! stupid that I am!” and Helena shrugged her shoulders and poked the fire, and tried to be angry with herself. “It is clear that if I mean to be like a rational being here, I must not spend my leisure hours—and they seem likely to be many—in this foolish manner; it is unthankful of me: there are many signs of kindness in this room, and both my uncle and aunt are very good to me. It was kind of my aunt to send her maid to me. How fortunate that Bertha was so particular in making us speak French, and that we had the little French girl from Sophy Allison’s to talk with, or I might have been at a loss how to communicate with my attendant; but, oh dear me! I was never meant to be a fine lady. Oh, Bertha, what shall I do without you?”

At this point the crying seemed about to return; so Helena vigorously turned her thoughts.

“I need not be a fine lady—there is always work to do. I am forgetting my calling. Because my faults are changing, and I am going to be indolent

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and discontented, instead of proud and wilful, I am forgetting that I shall have to strive against them. I have been thinking of myself more than of Him who has set this cross before me. Oh! that I may take it up in His strength, looking only unto Him; that I may never lose sight of the one thing needful; and then, although I am separated from the friends I shall always love better than any other, I shall know that I am never alone, and that I need never be unhappy."

So Helena's fireside reverie turned into earnest desires for good, and she was still teaching herself cheerfulness, when Marie came to inquire if she might prepare Mademoiselle's toilette. Mademoiselle was willing; and she found amusement in the dexterous way in which her wardrobe was unpacked, until the very dress was found which Marie considered fit for the occasion, and she sat down to submit her soft dark hair for the first time to a real dressing.

"Madame's love, and she would be glad to see Mademoiselle in her room whilst she is dressing," said Marie, when she had put the finishing touches to Mademoiselle, and had sufficiently admired her handiwork.

And then she escorted Mademoiselle to a room on the same floor, where Miladi was sitting yawning in an easy chair.

"I thought that you were never coming, Marie," said Miladi, as her maid entered.

"I am afraid that it is my fault, aunt Emily," said Helena, who followed.

"Really, Marie, you have done wonders," said Lady

Bertram, roused to a little animation as she saw Helena before her, with the freshness of her youth, aided by Marie's skilful touches. "You will be charming, my love, when you have been a little longer in Marie's hands. Her hair is the least in the world too full, Marie—there, that is it. Her face is classical. She requires the chaste, more than the striking. Ah, I wish that I was not so delicate, what pleasure I should have in directing your dress, my love! But already I am fatigued; I will rest an instant, Marie."

"My aunt is very kind," thought Helena, as she looked at herself in the pier-glass; and as she looked, she certainly agreed with her aunt that Marie had done wonders, and Helena forgot to add to her list of new enemies the vanity and trifling to which she was exposed.

But no great harm was done yet. She was amused to watch the elaborate dressing which her aunt was going through, and to hear the maid's observations on the same. Indeed, it seemed to both of them a labour which must be entered into with every faculty; but Helena's conclusion was that Mrs. Ellersley's sweet and ladylike appearance, when she was dressed with Susan's assistance, for the very grandest Oak-ridge occasions, was preferable to the rather fantastic and elaborate toilette in which Lady Bertram now appeared; though Marie certainly was wonderfully clever.

"You think a great deal, my love," said her aunt, once observing Helena's large dark eyes full of reflection. "You shall tell me some time what you think about it—it will amuse me; but now I am too tired.

Bring Bijou down stairs, Marie, and I will arrange myself, before the gentlemen appear. Helena, my love, give me your arm."

It seemed that an old friend of Captain Ellersley's had been invited in compliment to him, besides a nephew of Lady Bertram.

"You are old enough now to appear upon these quiet occasions," said her ladyship, after explaining this to Helena. "Although not introduced, it is a great advantage to see a little society before you are obliged to take part in it."

This was a fatiguing sentence for Lady Bertram to arrange, and she was so much exhausted by it, that, having told Helena where to place herself, she did not speak again until the gentlemen appeared, when she exerted herself to receive the stranger, and to greet her nephew, who was a young midshipman, just about to rejoin his vessel.

A long and very elaborate dinner succeeded, during which Helena listened to the conversation between her guardian and his military friend, and answered the questions that Sir John put to her now and then, as to whether she knew London, had been to the opera, and so on; but she was glad when she was able to retire, and follow Lady Bertram to the drawing-room. Here Lady Bertram very soon composed herself to sleep, which she said was necessary to restore her after the fatigue of dinner, and Helena, seeing that she should not be wanted to talk, crept noiselessly to one of the tables, that she might select a book to read. But Lady Bertram had not yet closed her eyes, and perceiving Helena's movements, she mur-

mured, "There is a new book on my table, my love. They say that it is very amusing." And though Helena would have preferred turning over some of the numbers that were scattered about, she took up the one pointed out to her, and looked into it.

But she soon found that it was of a kind that she was sure Bertha would not have allowed her to read, and she quietly closed it again. This time she tried a nearer table, and taking up almost the first volume she laid her hands upon, it proved to be a "Review," containing a sort of essay upon a book that she and Marian had lately been reading. This was a charming discovery: the review was clever; in some parts it agreed entirely with the opinions they had, with Bertha's guidance, formed upon the work; but here and there it spoke with a humorous irony that amused Helena very much.

She had quite forgotten that she was not at home, and, prefacing it with an "Oh, Bertha, listen," she was was going to read a passage aloud, when she recollected herself and stopped, not however before she had quite aroused her aunt.

"What is the matter?" she inquired, drowsily.

"I beg your pardon, aunt Emily," said Helena; "I was so much interested in my book, that I had forgotten."

"Were you dreaming, my love?" said Lady Bertram, only half awake.

"No, aunt," answered Helena; "I was beginning to speak to Bertha—to Miss Talbot—thinking that I was at Oakridge. I am very sorry that I have disturbed you."

"Is Bijou there?" inquired Lady Bertram, languidly.

"Yes, aunt—fast asleep," replied Helena.

"Who is Miss Talbot, my dear?"

"She was our governess," said Helena, "and Captain Ellersley's niece."

"How very strange!" said Lady Bertram, yawning.

"But had you no other governess, my love?"

"No," answered Helena; "Miss Talbot was very accomplished, and beautiful, too. She taught us because she liked to be useful, that was all."

"How very strange!" said Lady Bertram again.

"Do you like that book, my dear?"

"I am reading the — *Review*," said Helena, "and I like it very much."

Lady Bertram looked up; she seemed roused by the idea of Helena's reading the — *Review*—after dinner, too.

"I thought you were reading that new book—I forget its name," she added.

"I read a little of it," answered Helena, "but I did not like it."

"You must always wear your hair in that style, my love—it suits you," remarked Lady Bertram. She had not heard Helena's last observation, apparently.

Now that her aunt was awake, Helena thought that perhaps it was not polite to go on with her reading; but she wished for something to do, so she said,—

"I think I will go and find my work. I know the box that it was packed in."

"Oh, my love! do not think of unpacking anything to-night. There is a maid—Jane, I think, her name

is—who will put your things in order, under Marie's eye, to-morrow."

So Helena sat down again, and wondered what she should do all the evening. Her eye fell upon the work-table, and, at the risk of being troublesome, she said,—

"Durst you trust me with your embroidery, aunt Emily? I have worked a good deal."

"Oh, my love! that piece has been lying about for the last two months. I bought it in Paris, because it was such a lovely pattern, but I have never been strong enough to put in a stitch. I shall be charmed if you will take it."

Helena was profuse in her thanks, for really it would be a treat to her to try to imitate the exquisite French embroidery; and to have a definite employment was also a relief.

But the moment she took it the gentlemen appeared, and Lady Bertram began to fidget about the best place in the room for her to sit and work in, the most convenient table, and the light that was the least hurtful to her eyes, and wished the footman to be summoned to assist.

Helena was distressed that she should cause such trouble, and she was grateful to young Mr. Lennox, the midshipman, who, as soon as he comprehended the state of the case, said,—

"I see, aunt Bertram, you need not have Thomas up—I will move the things in a jiffy."

And, as he promised, in a few minutes, table, chair, and lamp were placed exactly as Lady Bertram wished, and Helena allowed at last to sit down quietly.

She thanked Mr. Lennox with so much sweetness, that he was emboldened to sit down beside her, and to tell her how he had been used to do such things for his own sisters, who made quite a slave of him—so that he was in good training for the strictest vessel ; and this led to anecdotes of his life on board ship, and the voyages he had made, and the evening passed more pleasantly than Helena had thought possible.

She was disappointed in her hope of having some conversation with her guardian ; but she was consoled by his asking her, as she bid him good-night, to walk with him early in the morning, to make some purchases that Mrs. Ellersley had entrusted him with.

That was something to look forward to, and the more likely to be accomplished, that Lady Bertram, when bidding Helena good-night, said,—

“ You will breakfast with Sir John, my love, in the morning. I am quite rejoiced that he will have you now, for I am rarely able to appear before the luncheon hour.”

In her own room Helena found a maid, whom she supposed to be the Jane that had been spoken of. She was more like the Oakridge Bessy, and not nearly so formidable as the Frenchwoman, and she rejoiced that Jane would probably be often Marie’s substitute.

When Helena told her the hour that she wished to be waked in the morning, the maid looked surprised, but said nothing, and Helena dismissed her quickly, that she might sit down before the fire, and think awhile upon the change that had come over her life ; but soon finding that too sad an occupation, she ceased to indulge in it, and before long retired to rest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE maid appeared punctually with hot water at the hour that Helena had desired, and explained, with some appearance of satisfaction, that Marie was not down yet. Should she call her, if Miss Bertram was going to get up now, or would her services be sufficient?

"Oh! you will do," said Helena; "I will ring when I require you," and the housemaid disappeared, grumbling, as she went, about her work, and the different kinds of whims that ladies took.

There was my lady herself, with a fine lace cap and ribbons on, sitting wide awake in bed till what might be most folks' dinner-time; and here was the young lady, pleasant-mannered though she was, must be up and stirring even before Sir John came down, and he was soon enough!

Happily ignorant of these observations, Helena proceeded with her toilette until she required help, when she summoned Jane; but soon discovering that she made a very indifferent lady's maid, she sent her down again, and finished by herself, not so much disturbed by the want of Marie's skilful assistance as by imaginary sounds of — "Please, open the door, Nella," and visions of Consie, in all the freshness of her first morning's bath and dressing, coming to give her a kiss, and tell her about the swallows that were making a nest in the nursery window.

To dispel the Oakridge fancies, Helena looked out of the window. The street was quiet and half asleep, and the continued rumble of the distant thoroughfares only made the silence more apparent. There was a little traffic going on at the area gates, and a scarlet postman hastening up the street; but the many blinds drawn down and the general stillness showed that it was not yet the proper hour for fashionable London to arise.

What was to be done? Helena did not like to venture yet down stairs—she felt somehow that Jane would not be pleased to see her; so she began to finish the unpacking that Marie had left the night before, and soon became quite happy in the employment. There was a large wardrobe, which she filled with her clothes; then she proceeded to unpack her treasures, and every one of them seemed like a dear old friend turning up in a foreign land.

The mantelshelf was soon covered with photographs of every one at Oakridge—how delightful! almost as good as having themselves; she had quite forgotten her photographs before. The toilet-table was spread with many a little souvenir and present; and when her music and drawing portfolios were placed in one corner of the room, and some of her books had filled shelves, and others had been piled upon the table, together with desks and various boxes, she looked with pride around her apartment, and felt that she had made it her own—a sort of home.

“Now I will have the boxes removed, then I shall be comfortable,” she said to herself, and rang for Jane.

To her request, the maid, in astonishment, assented, and said that she would fetch some one to help her; but she added,—

“Sir John, miss, is down stairs, and breakfast is ready, I think.”

Helena was surprised. She had been so busy, that she had forgotten breakfast; and she was about to hasten down stairs, when Marie entered, smart and affable as usual. She was surprised to find that Mademoiselle was up; Jane ought to have told her, but could she not finish Mademoiselle's toilet?

“No, thank you,” cried Helena; “my uncle is down stairs. I am going to breakfast,” and hurrying away, she left Marie holding up her hands in horror at the imperfect style of Mademoiselle's hair, which truly had not been improved by the labours she had been going through; Bertha would have probably called it untidy; and she was struck with wonder at the marvel that Mademoiselle had been performing in her own apartment.

But Helena only thought of the late breakfast-hour, and her uncle waiting; and when she found both her guardian and Sir John in the dining-room, she commenced a humble apology for being so late.

“You have fallen into fashionable hours quickly,” said Captain Ellersley, smiling. “You would scarcely believe, Sir John, that your niece has been accustomed to do half a day's work before this hour at Oakridge.”

“We have all the extremes of industry and laziness in London,” said Sir John Bertram. “For my part, I prefer continental hours; but I assure you, Helena,”

he added, courteously, "I am too much pleased to have a young lady to pour out tea for me, to grumble if I am kept waiting a few minutes for her."

Helena submitted to be thus forgiven, and politely handed to the breakfast-table; and then she thought it was time to justify herself, so she said, as she poured out some coffee for Captain Ellersley,—

"I must tell you, uncle Bertram, that I have been up a long time; but I was so busy, that I forgot all about breakfast."

Sir John laughed, and looked amused at the idea of her being so busy; but he only began to press some stewed mushrooms upon her, and then directed his conversation to Captain Ellersley, and she resumed her duties as tea-maker, which she fulfilled entirely to their satisfaction.

"Now, Helena," said Captain Ellersley, after breakfast, "when can you go out with me? I fear I cannot answer for a minute after twelve o'clock. I shall be engaged all the rest of the day."

"Any time—directly, if you like," readily answered Helena. "Shall I put my bonnet on now?"

Captain Ellersley agreed, and explained to Sir John Bertram that he wished Helena to help him to execute some commissions; and Sir John laughingly protested against Captain Ellersley being the first to take Helena out in London, but pretended to console him by saying that there was nothing to be seen so early, and Helena ran away.

She had scarcely reached her room, when Marie came to say that "Miladi wished to see Mademoiselle in her own room."

Helena chafed a little at the summons, but obeyed it. Miladi was in a becoming toilette, but still in bed. She saluted Helena affectionately, and said,—

“Marie tells me you were up frightfully early this morning, love; did you not rest well?”

“Excellently, thank you, aunt,” replied Helena, cheerfully; “but I always got up early at Oakridge, and I should like to do the same here.”

“But your dress, my love; it is perfectly horrible this morning,” said Lady Bertram, shrugging her shoulders. “Until you have your own maid, you really must wait for Marie.”

Helena replied, “I will another morning, aunt Emily, if she will come a little earlier; but pray excuse me now—I am going out with Captain Ellersley.”

“So early!” exclaimed Lady Bertram; “and your toilette not yet made! Is the carriage ordered?”

“We are going to walk,” said Helena. “Captain Ellersley has some shopping to do, and he wishes me to help him.”

“Impossible, my dear! Shopping at this hour!” said Lady Bertram; “and on foot! When I was your age, I always walked early with my governess; but shopping! bah!”

“Oh, pray, aunt Emily, let me go,” said Helena, in despair. “Captain Ellersley wants me particularly.”

“My love, do not speak with such a tragic air; it fatigues me,” said Lady Bertram, looking still more annoyed. “I recollect myself: Captain Ellersley is one of your guardians; but he really should consider

that you are with your uncle now. I shall be glad when you are left to us."

"Then I may go, aunt Emily?" said Helena, swallowing a good deal of indignation.

"Do not distress me, my love," said Lady Bertram. "If Captain Ellersley insists upon it, you cannot refuse; only it is very strange. Pray hand me my *vinaigrette*, and send Marie."

Glad so to get away, Helena hastened to equip, and go down stairs. On the drawing-room landing she met Sir John, coming to seek her.

"I have been with Lady Bertram," said Helena, a good deal ruffled. "She thought it too early for me to go out."

"Don't let aunt Emily make a fine lady of you," said Sir John, laughing. "I must take you out with me every morning, I think, or my lady will coddle you as much as she does Bijou."

"And make me as useless," thought Helena. "Well, it is some comfort that my uncle does not agree with her." But aloud she said,—

"Uncle Bertram, will you tell me if I may do one thing? I should so much like to send some presents to my dear friends at Oakridge—to the children, at least. May I?"

"To be sure you may," said Sir John, pulling his purse out in a minute.

"Oh, thank you, uncle," said Helena, joyfully; "but I do not need any more money. I have plenty; only I was wondering how I could manage it. I cannot buy things so well for Oakridge when I am with Captain Ellersley, you know."

"Of course you cannot," said her uncle, who delighted in anything like a little plot. "I will take you myself after luncheon, if aunt Emily does not want you."

"Thank you," said Helena again; a little less joyfully this time, for she thought the condition made the matter uncertain. "Then I will not keep my guardian waiting any longer. Good-bye uncle Bertram," and she hastened to the dining-room, where she found Captain Ellersley, a little inclined to scold.

But it was pleasant to be scolded in a way that reminded her so strongly of Oakridge, that she could fancy that Marian or she had been wrong in their accounts; or that they had stayed out too late in the twilight, or that they had not been dressed for church soon enough, or any of the minor delinquencies that fell under his notice; and although she apologized, she did not look very sorry.

There was something very cheering in an early walk through the splendid squares and busy streets of London, on that bright spring morning, with her beloved guardian. Every thing she saw amused her; and she laughed, and stared, and chatted, with a freedom that was increased by the restraint that she had been feeling herself under for the last few hours.

The shopping was not tedious, and was finished only too soon; and it was with regret that she recognized, as they returned, the quiet squares that were in the neighbourhood of her uncle's apartments.

"You know, Helena," said her guardian, as they drew near home, "that I am obliged to return to-

morrow. Mind that you have all your messages ready for me. I expect to be heavily laden."

"Oh, sir," said Helena, "pray do not speak of that. When you are gone, it will be so different. But I can tell you the messages now," she added, with an effort, speaking more cheerfully. "Please give my love to every one, separately, and tell them that I shall think of them at all times, every day,—because I cannot help it; or else I would not, because it makes me, of course, wish for what I cannot have. And please tell Mrs. Ellersley and Bertha that I think London a beautiful place, and that my uncle and aunt are very kind to me, and that I am—I shall be—very comfortable."

"My dear Helena, how much more?" said Captain Ellersley, smiling.

"Oh, sir, I could say a great deal more, but I must not," replied Helena; "but could you tell me—do you know if I am to have masters, or learn anything? because I am afraid I shall forget all I know, however much I try not to do so; and then about my coming to Oakridge sometimes."

"I can tell you something about both," replied her guardian. "You are to have masters, which will be a great advantage to you; and you are to spend a few weeks in the autumn with us; and, perhaps, again after Christmas."

Helena was warm in her thanks, and delighted.

"So now, my dear, you have only to make yourself as happy as you can, and take advantage of your opportunities," continued her guardian. "You must take care not to become indolent. You will be

thrown, I see, in a great measure, upon yourself. Remember the good habits you have formed, and try to keep them up. Be a good girl, and do not let your uncle spoil you."

They had now reached the door, and as they waited for the bell to be answered, Captain Ellersley said,—

"I am going out to dinner to-night, and shall scarcely see you again. My dear child, God bless you!"

It was with rather a heavy step that Helena went up stairs. Lady Bertram had not yet appeared; so, after taking off her bonnet, she began to think what she should have been doing with Bertha at that hour. There was a great pleasure in selecting the right books, and taking them to a quiet corner in the drawing-room. She spent more than an hour, in hard study, very happily.

She was interrupted by the entrance of Bijou, and Marie with the shawls and properties of her mistress, and Lady Bertram herself soon followed, very much shocked to find that Helena was still in the *uncoiffée* state that she had seen her some hours before.

"My love, you really must not appear in this condition another morning," she said, invading the quiet corner. "Imagine, if any early visitors had arrived; I should have died with chagrin. Pray go at once to Marie."

Helena rose to obey, and gathered up her books.

"You are studying," said Lady Bertram. "That is good of you, my love. I should wish you to be

very accomplished. You shall have the best masters, as I remember that I always had."

Helena expressed her pleasure in the prospect, and then went to place herself in the hands of Marie, who did not release her for more than half an hour. Her appearance was then, however, so much improved, that Lady Bertram saw her join them at luncheon with pleasure, and her morning's peevishness gradually softened down, and, when luncheon was over, she proposed to make the great exertion of taking Helena to her own milliner's before her usual drive in the Park.

"I am sorry to interfere with your arrangements, my dear," said Sir John, on hearing this proposal; "but I had made a previous arrangement with Helena. Cannot the new bonnet wait until to-morrow?"

"It is not a new bonnet alone, Sir John," said Lady Bertram; "Helena requires many other things that you cannot understand."

"I confess my want of ability to enter into such mysteries," said Sir John; "but surely one day will not make such a great difference. You shall have Helena to do what you like with to-morrow."

Lady Bertram saw that her husband was in earnest, so with a half-playful, half-cross, remonstrance against the tyranny of guardians, she acquiesced, and Helena, with pleasure, equipped herself for an exploring expedition with her uncle.

There was certainly more to see now than there had been early in the morning, and Helena's exclamations of astonishment at the splendid carriages and the number of gaily-dressed people, which might

have fatigued Lady Bertram, were an amusement to Sir John. So it was well that Helena obtained her first sight of the gay world under his auspices. He proved to be an excellent guide, and took her to some shops, where the only difficulty was to choose from amongst so many beautiful things. There was no reason for her to hesitate because of expense, for her uncle generously insisted upon bearing all the cost of her first shopping, and presented her with more money than she had ever had at one time before. In her gratitude, Helena only feared that she should detain him too long, and was, therefore, hurried in her selection; but he entered into her business with some interest, and in the end she had purchased a gift for every one, and a box to pack them in, and arrived at Hyde Park Corner just as Lady Bertram's carriage was entering the Park.

She stopped for them, and Sir John, having been as kind, according to his notions, as possible to his niece, was glad enough to turn her over to his wife, and Helena was handed into the carriage. Then Lady Bertram was much disturbed in her mind as to whether she should go back to the milliner's now or not; but she decided that, after all, as Helena was not introduced, her costume was not of so very much consequence, and they proceeded into the Park.

Then Helena began in her most lively manner to expatiate upon the kindness of her uncle. "You must know, aunt Emily, I quite longed to send some little presents to the dear children at Oakridge, that they might see that I did not forget them, and uncle Bertram was so extremely kind; he has taken me to

the very best shops. I had no idea there had been such beautiful shops anywhere, and I have got something for everybody, and the most lovely doll for my little pet Consie. I can just imagine her face when she opens the box, for we have bought a box, too, for them all to be packed in, and the little ones will think it has come from the fairy Benigna, that Edith tells them stories of. Was it not extremely kind of my uncle?"

"Very kind of him," said Lady Bertram, in a quiet tone that rather chilled Helena's enthusiasm. "But I do think, if it was only to buy presents for Mrs. Ellersley's family that he took you out, he might have waited a day or two."

"But you know, aunt Emily, we wanted to send them home by my guardian—by Captain Ellersley, I mean," said Helena.

"I admire your affection, my love," said Lady Bertram, languidly; "but still, you know you are with your own relations now. We have a very different claim upon you from the Ellersleys, and there need scarcely have been this haste, I think. The very hearing of it has quite fatigued me."

There was a sort of quiet scorn in Lady Bertram's tone, when she alluded to the Ellersleys, that annoyed Helena excessively. She would fain have burst forth in praise of them. "I love them dearly—I shall never love any one so well—you cannot tell how much I owe to them,"—was on her lips; but, besides feeling that it would fatigue Lady Bertram to listen to such a tirade, she was aware that it would not be becoming, and she refrained.

But a silence followed, which showed that Helena was not well pleased ; and Lady Bertram sighed, and applied to her *vinaigrette*, and pitied herself for having the charge of a young lady who, though decidedly elegant in appearance, was so oppressively vehement in her opinions. The fact was, that Lady Bertram was jealous of her niece's affection for Oakridge, and to see that Helena was now vexed at what she had said about her former friends only increased the feeling.

Fortunately, very soon a splendid equipage came in sight. It belonged to a distinguished foreign ambassador, and Lady Bertram condescended to call her niece's attention to it.

Helena, who had been employed in schooling away her irritation, was sufficiently charmed to see one whose name had long been known to her ; and once having begun to look out of the window, she found plenty of amusement, and her *naïve* observations, when not applied to the children at Oakridge, amused, but did not fatigue, her aunt.

But a little damp had been thrown upon Helena's delight in the presents ; and when, on their return, she found them all spread upon the table in the hall, she had scarcely courage to ask if they might be taken up to her own room.

"If you wish it, my love," said Lady Bertram, giving the necessary orders ; "but surely Thomas could have packed them for you here."

Helena was satisfied that she was to be allowed to have possession of her parcels, and offered her arm to assist her aunt up stairs.

Lady Bertram stopped to rest in the drawing-room, and was so overpowered to find there a note which required an immediate answer, that Helena ventured to ask if she could write it for her.

The offer was accepted graciously. Helena accordingly wrote the note, and was rewarded by her aunt's approval.

"Thank you, my love," she said. "It is a charming note. Your handwriting is distinguished. It will be delightful to have you for my amanuensis."

"There is one thing for me to do, then," said Helena to herself.

As the note was finished, a visitor was announced. It proved to be Mrs. Sidney Clavering, a distant relation of the Bertrams; so Helena had to stay in the room, and be introduced to her. She was also compelled to listen to a short detail of her own history, ending by an expression of regret that it had been so long before Sir John Bertram had been able to assume the charge of his niece; but, fortunately, she had been under the care of some nice people, the Ellersleys of Oakridge.

Why Helena should object to the Ellersleys being called "nice people," she hardly knew; but she was glad when, after bestowing a good deal of patronizing notice upon her, Mrs. Sidney Clavering withdrew.

"Now for my packing," thought Helena. "I will put little slips of paper to every present, with the name, and a separate little message. There will surely not be much dressing to-night, for we are to be quite alone."

She was much mistaken. Lady Bertram thought it

a good opportunity for carrying into effect some theories of her own with regard to Helena's attire, and made Marie try the experiments under her own eye.

In the end, Helena was not dressed until after Lady Bertram had gone down stairs, and when she entered the drawing-room, she had the disappointment of hearing that her guardian and Sir John Bertram had just gone.

"Captain Ellersley left a message for you, my love," said Lady Bertram. "He desired me to give his love to you, and that he was sorry he could not wait to take leave of you. To-morrow he sets off by an early train, so that you will not see him. He certainly is a most gentlemanly man, my dear."

But compliments, even upon the master of Oakridge, were unheeded by Helena just now.

"What time does he go, aunt Emily?" she asked; "surely not too early for me to bid him good-bye in the morning."

"It is impossible, my love," replied her aunt. "Sir John ordered breakfast to be ready for him and Captain Ellersley at eight o'clock."

"I can very easily be down at that hour," said Helena.

"My dear, Marie would not like to be disturbed so early—she is not accustomed to it."

"Dear aunt," said Helena, earnestly, "pray do not think me troublesome, but I should so much like to breakfast with my guardian to-morrow. Do allow me? I can be dressed by Marie afterwards."

"My dear Helena, you quite overpower me," said

Lady Bertram, in an exhausted tone. "Do as you like. After to-morrow we shall have no more of these discussions, I do hope."

At this moment, dinner was announced, and Helena offered her arm to lead her aunt to the dining-room.

"Bertha used to complain of my being too impetuous," she said to herself; "she would be pleased to see how nicely I shall be smoothed down here."

The box was packed in the end, but it was not until bed-time gave Helena an opportunity; for she found out that her aunt liked backgammon, and after tea she played it with her, and did her best to amuse Lady Bertram all the evening, so that the latter said,—

"It will really be nice to have you with me, love, when Sir John is out to dinner, or at his club."

But the box was packed, with the slips of paper and the messages, and it was conveyed down stairs by Jane, to be placed with Captain Ellersley's portmanteau, and Jane at the same time received orders to waken Miss Bertram to-morrow, even earlier than she had done this morning.

And Helena, to the amusement of both her guardians, was sitting at the breakfast-table when they appeared, as neatly attired as if she had been at Oakridge; and she had the pleasure of delivering again her final messages, and of putting the extra box herself under Captain Ellersley's especial care. Then she resigned herself to Marie's hands, and was pronounced presentable, when she paid her respects to her aunt afterwards.

Lady Bertram was so relieved by the departure of

Captain Ellersley, that she was roused into uncommon exertion, and after coming down at an earlier hour than usual, she entered upon several schemes for Helena's benefit. A visit to the milliner, of course, was one; but besides that, she begged Sir John to choose for his niece at once a really good pianoforte, and then, with the assistance of Mrs. Sidney Clavering, whom she took Helena to visit, a complete system of lessons was arranged, from the best masters in music, the languages, and drawing, to occupy every morning.

This was an enchanting prospect for Helena, and the only drawback was, that Mrs. Clavering, who lived very near, and had no children of her own, offered to come in and sit with Helena whilst she received her lessons. But the offer was very kind, and Helena reproached herself for the prejudice she had taken against her patronising relative.

Now, Helena's new life might be said to have begun in good earnest, with all its drawbacks and all its privileges, and Helena set herself to estimate the one, without too much regretting the other. One trouble remained, which was not so easy to get over.

The great consolation that she had promised to herself was in writing to Bertha, and in receiving letters from Oakridge, in return. But it was not long before she found that such constant communication with her old friends was disagreeable to her aunt. This was a heavy cross to her, but she tried to submit to it. Fortunately, her uncle did not share the feeling, and handed over the Oakridge letters to his niece when they arrived, with a pleasure that seemed to rival her

own. Helena always mentioned these letters to her aunt ; but prudently refraining from dwelling upon their contents, she avoided annoying her. And though it was grievous to her not to be able to write more frequently in answer to them, and she missed the help and sympathy that she had expected, yet she trusted that they would believe she did not forget them ; and she looked forward to the autumn, which, after all, seemed long in coming.

But before the autumn came, Helena's patient industry and her cheerful temper had begun to endear her to her aunt and uncle, and she had the joy of perceiving that they loved her, and that she was really useful to them. During the summer, Lady Bertram's usual delicacy increased into a real illness, and Helena nursed her with a care that made a mutual affection spring up between them ; and Lady Bertram beginning to respect Helen's earnest principle, began herself to desire to know something of the things that seemed to Helena of so much greater value than the richest pleasures that dress or gaiety could give.

Meanwhile, she recovered slowly, and Sir John Bertram became doubly anxious to find some place in the country which might suit her health better than the heated air of London. For some time he sought in vain ; several houses presented themselves, but were discarded. At last his agent was successful ; a large country-house was found, which appeared to unite all the advantages that Sir John and Lady Bertram desired.

The agent was sent down to look at it, and pro-

nounced it a good bargain. It seemed that the owner had lately died abroad, and the heir wished immediately to sell it. The place would require much repair; but that was rather an advantage, thought Sir John, for then they could make any alterations that they liked, and he gave orders for the purchase.

When all was concluded, Sir John came to announce it to his wife and Helena, who were quite pining for fresh country air.

"A most singular thing it is," said Sir John, "that the place turns out to be, as Lingard tells me, close to Captain Ellersley's. Nice for you to be between two guardians, eh, Helena? You will know the house, perhaps; it is Bathurst."

Helena trembled, tried to speak, and burst into tears.

Lady Bertram applied to her smelling-bottle; but she was not so intolerant of a little display of feeling as she would have been three months ago. Helena, however, speedily recollected herself, and smiling away her tears, she explained how well she knew Bathurst, and how delightful it all was to her.

Sir John was pleased to give her pleasure, and, in high good humour, he said,—

"But, Helena, if only a brook divides the grounds, we shall never be able to keep you in—you will be running away to your old friends."

The words "running away" struck an old chord in Helena's memory, and they made her blush even now; but in a moment she looked up, and said, earnestly,—

"You need not be afraid of that, uncle Bertram.

Oakridge is very dear to me, but I would not run away from you and my aunt Emily."

No one could doubt Helena's sincerity, and Lady Bertram was content.

But content was too small a word for Helena's satisfaction. Everything was bright before her. Her heart was full of thankfulness, and it cheered Lady Bertram to watch the happiness that showed in every word and gesture. She now appreciated the trial that it must have been to Helena to part with those loved friends, even before, by intimate acquaintance, she had begun to value them herself.

Part of the house at Bathurst was to be prepared for them as rapidly as possible, for the rest could be better done under Sir John's direction, and by the end of August it was ready.

As may be supposed, Oakridge was not left in ignorance of this happy turn of things. To have Bathurst sold to pleasant neighbours was a good thing, but to have Helena there was beyond their expectation. Daily now they might expect to hear of the arrival of the Bertrams; the old flag would once more be hoisted over the gabled roof.

"And it will not be very long after that before the dear child comes to see us," said Mrs. Ellersley, as the much-talked-of subject was again discussed. "I can never get her pale face out of my mind, as she sat beside you in the railway-carriage, on the morning she left home, trying to smile and look hopeful. Dear Helena! But what a poor attempt it was!"

"She writes very cheerfully, though," said Captain Ellersley; "and Ellen, my love, you must prepare for

a little disappointment. It will be a different thing having Helena at Bathurst to having her living here. Her aunt and uncle have the first claim upon her attention now."

"I know that," replied his wife. "Do not be afraid that I shall be too exacting, Arthur. I am convinced that her affection for us will never alter, and I shall be satisfied if we often see her, and are able to know that she is going on well."

This little conversation took place one lovely evening, when Oakridge, seen in the warm light of August, was gorgeous in its attire of roses and geraniums. The scent of other flowers and the faint odour of distant hay filled the air with summer perfume. Mrs. Ellersley was sitting just within one of the drawing-room windows, which were open to the ground, and her husband, who had been having a long walk with Bertha and the girls, was standing upon the grass outside.

Edith and Marian had Percy in the swing ; Bertha, with the baby Arthur in her arms, was talking to old nurse ; and Consie, who had just been crowned by Edith with a wreath of jessamine, was sitting upon the turf, looking towards the hollow, and holding her pretty head very stiffly for fear her starry honours should drop off. Suddenly the little girl gave a cry, not of sorrow—but for a moment they were startled. Then, forgetting all about her wreath, she rushed down the hill, crying, "Nella ! Nella !"

"Stop, darling, I am coming ; wait a minute," cried the warm-hearted voice they knew so well ; and making her way through the branches, and springing

from stone to stone across the almost dried-up brook, Helena once more came back to Oakridge.

We cannot describe the meeting. It made up for past sorrow, and it was an earnest of much happiness to come.

"We arrived this evening," said Helena; "and, directly after dinner, my aunt lay down as usual, and begged Sir John to take me out for a walk. She knew very well where I should come to, *madré*, dear. I have left my uncle far behind—he is talking to a gamekeeper; but I told him that I knew my way quite well," and in the fulness of her heart, Helena laughed as Consie might have done.

She was sitting on a low ottoman beside Mrs. Ellersley, with the little girl at her feet and the others clustered round.

"How much you are improved, my dear," said Mrs. Ellersley, as, now that the hat was thrown aside, what Lady Bertram would have called Helena's elegant *tournure* came in view.

Bertha followed her aunt's gaze, and she looked anxiously. But Helena's eyes met hers with truthful, loving affection, and Bertha was satisfied.

Helena was unharmed by the trifles and the vanities that Bertha knew so well; she was still in the right way, doing the work that was set before her.

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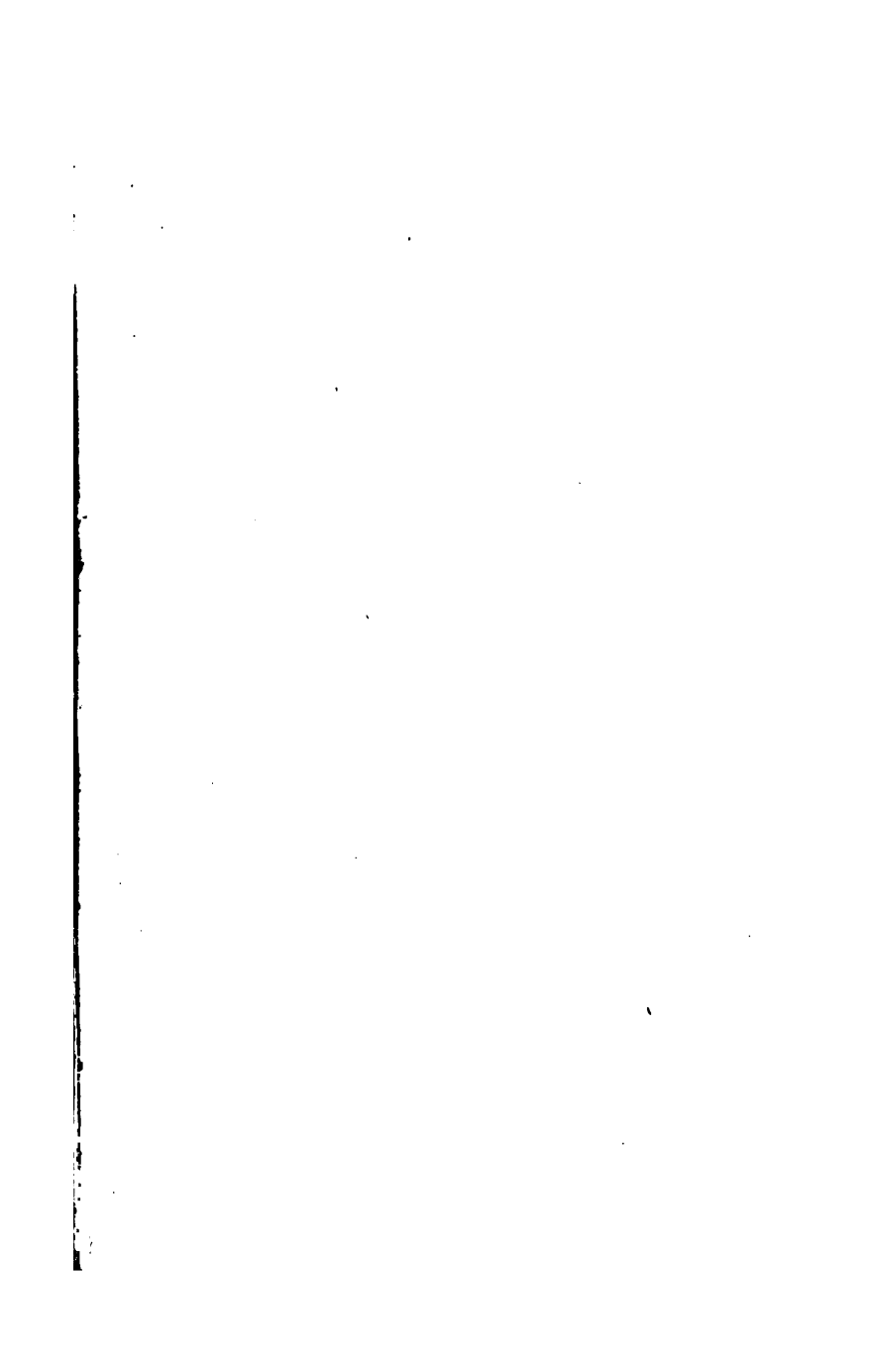
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